

PART I

Designing for Traffic

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CHAPTER 1

How to Transform Your Web Site's Success

How well is your web site doing? What does success mean? Maybe you have goals you can measure. How many of those goals does your site achieve, and what does that mean for your business?

Whether you know your site's current performance, or it's currently a mystery, I want to help you make it far more successful. This book shows you how. Using the process I teach you in this book, you will get more value for each dollar or each hour you invest in your web marketing.

Does This Sound Like Your Web Site?

Do you remember how your web site was created? The process probably went something like this. The web designer was briefed. The designer used her experience, insight, and what she knows about the market to create her best guess at a design that would please the client. There was some back and forth about the design, taking into account different people's insights and preferences. Finally, the successful design was built and launched.

The result is a web site that has all usual content you would expect. Your home page tells people who you are and what you do. The site talks about all the products and services you offer and their features. There may be an FAQ page to answer other questions prospects may have. There is some means to purchase or to take the next step, like a "Contact Us" page.

The site may have analytics set up, which tells you how many people are visiting the site, what they searched for when they arrived, and where they go on the site. You probably do not do anything with that information.

You may even have set up pay-per-click advertising, or done some link-building activity.

It all seems pretty complete. But I bet it doesn't produce great results. I frequently hear web site owners tell that they have paid thousands for a web site that has delivered no business in years.

Here's the problem. Most site owners—even most web designers—don't realize how much more powerful their web sites could be. The vast majority of sites on the Web today could attract far more visitors, and convert far more of those visitors to take desired actions and complete the site's goals.

The reason why most people don't know how to make their web sites perform better is because they are being built the way they have always been built (which is badly). In this chapter, I describe this old model of designing web sites, explain why it is insufficient for your needs, and introduce the new way to go about marketing your business on the Web.

The good news is, it is actually quite easy to achieve significant success online. You just need to know the steps and put them into practice. All the steps you need to know are in this book, together with a complete worked example, case studies, samples, and a wealth of tips and advice. Follow the steps I give you, and I guarantee you will make your web site more successful.

The “First Best Guess” Method of Web Design

I describe the approach to web design that you're probably familiar with as the “First Best Guess” method. The decisions that drive the structure and design of sites is based mainly on guesswork, or on looking at the competition's sites, which were designed based on guesswork.

When it comes to delivering results, this method has a poor track record. It is fundamentally flawed, because it is ignorant about what factors really influence success and how to optimize those factors.

Bad at Attracting Traffic

With regard to attracting visitors, the old method takes the view, “If you build it, they will come.” The client and designer assume that all you can do is sum up what you do as clearly as possible, ensure the search engines find the site, get links from relevant directories, and wait for visitors to turn up.

If you need more visitors, you can buy traffic through advertising, which does not always pay off. You might also hire a *search engine optimization (SEO)* firm to generate better search rankings through an extensive link-building campaign. This also does not always work.

The fundamental flaw with this approach to getting visitors is that it is far too narrow. It takes a singular approach. You have a home page, which says what the company does and what you're about. You have a page for your services or products, and maybe another page that describes each one.

The result is that you get a generic home page that gives several weak and mixed messages. The product or service pages give more detailed information that might attract people looking for those things. The “frequently asked questions” page might add a few more useful terms that stand a chance of matching the occasional search engine query.

It isn't that there is anything *wrong* with this approach. The problem is that it isn't *enough*. It falls far short of what is possible. The rest of Part I of this book will show you how much farther it is possible to reach, and exactly how to do it for your own web site.

Bad at Conversion

When it comes to converting visitors into customers, again the traditional approach is pretty ineffective. The site talks about what you do and how you do it. It tells visitors about the features of your products, and provides the information they need. And it gives them a way to buy, to request more information, or to contact you. What more could it do?

The answer is: a lot more! When a web site is designed correctly, it can engage directly with many more different types of visitors and lead them to find exactly what they want.

A site that is at once too narrow and too generic will fail to attract the right people. When search engines find a page that talks about a bunch of different things, they will identify that the page is *about* several topics (but none with much strength). Search engines match pages to people's searches, so generic pages will only be matched to generic searches. But no one is searching for a bunch of different topics together. When someone searches, they search for a specific thing, and they will get the result that is most relevant to that thing.

Say your business is tax advice. You may attract someone looking for “tax advisor” in your local area. But how many people who need tax advice are looking specifically for “tax advisor”? Only a minority. Many more will be looking for a range of more specific needs, such as “managing tax on saving for child’s college fund.”

For those who are searching for your generic offering, how much competition is there for that term? If your web site does not appear on the first couple of search engine results pages, it is unlikely to bring you much business.

If visitors do arrive at your “tax advisor” home page, they will find a broad message that describes all the different things you can do. If they do not connect quickly with a message that tells them they are in the right place to get what they want, they are unlikely to persevere. They will go back to the search results and try again to find a better fit.

Part II of this book is all about optimizing your conversion rates for visitors who do come to your web site. It breaks down in detail the steps for generating conversions, and gives you clear steps to get the maximum value from every visitor.

A New Perspective on Web Design

The methods I teach you in this book require a new perspective on what “web design” means.

Design does not mean creating stuff that looks good. That’s art. Someone who creates web pages that look good, whether or not they work, is not a web designer but an artist, or a graphic designer at best.

You should view design as *the creation of a new solution to a problem*. That often means creating an experience for people, whether it be a lecture, a dinner menu, a ceremony, a sales pitch, a perfume, or a charity campaign.

Unlike art, design always has a purpose. In web design, you always have goals to achieve. An e-commerce site should sell stuff. A marketing site should gather leads or communicate a message. A web-based application should allow people to carry out certain tasks.

Your goals define the problem you need to solve. Design is the process you follow to create the best possible solution to that problem. So web design does not start with graphics. It starts with understanding the challenge. Who am I communicating with?

What do they want? How can I attract them? And how can I get them to do what the site needs them to do?

NOTE *What are your web site's goals?
What is the value of each goal to your organization?
How many goals does the web site need to deliver in order to be a success?*

This high-level vision of web design places it in the broader realm of *marketing*. Marketing is the discipline of defining markets and offerings that deliver what the markets need in order to achieve a result (which is usually to make a profit).

So a web designer should be a marketer who operates in the web medium. In addition to the functional tasks involved with creating a web site, the design process must include techniques to target markets, to reach out to them, and to lead them from wherever they are to the point of taking action. For most web designers, this requires a new set of skills.

The new skills I will show you go beyond creating appealing graphic designs and beyond search engine optimization. You will learn how you can proactively structure your web site to reach more new markets, and to reach deeper into those markets. You will discover a step-by-step process that continually builds your web site into a conversion machine!

The New Approach

It should be becoming clear that to achieve its goals, your web site needs to do only two things:

- 1.** It needs to get the right number of the right kind of people to visit it.
- 2.** It then needs to get as many of those people as possible to take action.

If a web site does not address the right needs in the right markets, it will not get the visitors it needs to succeed. If it fails to appeal to its visitors, and to lead them powerfully along the path to get what they want, the traffic will not be converted into business success.

Success = Traffic × Conversion

If your web site sells peanuts, the number of peanuts you sell is exactly the number of visitors that visit your site multiplied by the site's conversion rate. Clearly, if you have no visitors to your site, you can't sell any peanuts.

If you have a bricks-and-mortar peanut store, it doesn't matter how great your product is, how pleasant your service, and attractive your prices, if your store is hidden in a back street where nobody knows about it.

WARNING *Zero Traffic × Any Conversion Rate = Zero Success*

Likewise, if your conversion rate stinks, any traffic you get will only generate poor results. This would be like establishing your peanut store in a great location on a busy street, putting up great signs and never opening the doors, then wondering why you didn't sell any peanuts.

WARNING *Any Traffic × Zero Conversion Rate = Zero Success*

This means that both traffic and conversion rate are critical for success. It is unwise to neglect either your traffic or your conversion rate. You can prove this pretty easily. A number that's the result of multiplying two other numbers can be represented by a rectangle. The optimal result (greatest area) is achieved when the factors are more balanced, as shown in Figure 1-1. So you need to invest effort both in methods that increase your targeted traffic and methods that optimize your conversion rate.

Your Major Advantages

Today, you have a number of serious advantages over previous generations. With the Internet, it is easier to generate business than at any other time in history. More people are doing more online than ever before. And it is cheaper and quicker to reach them than ever before.

On the flip side, there is also more competition than ever before, which means the greatest rewards will go to the sites that do the best job of attracting and converting traffic. You have this book, so the know-how is in your hands, which gives you a competitive advantage.

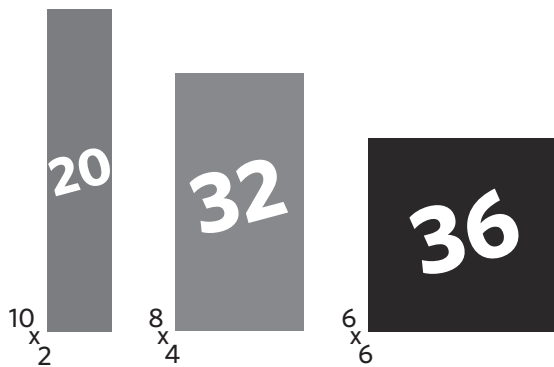


FIGURE 1-1 Investing effort in both traffic and conversion delivers the best results.

DIRECT RESPONSE MARKETING

The Internet is also the world's most powerful *direct response marketing* medium. (The pioneer in this area is Ken McCarthy, who has been teaching business owners how to use direct response techniques in the new media in his seminars since 1994.) Direct response marketing was created in the late nineteenth century, when people started marketing directly to householders using mailed product lists. Customers could choose and order what they wanted, which could be delivered directly to them using the railroads and the new U.S. Postal Service.

Direct response introduced two crucial factors entirely new to marketing:

- ▶ The marketer communicates *directly to the consumer*.
- ▶ The consumer orders *direct from the marketer*.

Aside from cutting out the distributors and traditional retailers, the reason direct response was so successful is that it allowed marketers to do something they could never do before: measure the results of every communication.

Unlike branding and advertising, which deliver fuzzy feedback at best, now marketers could change the product lines, prices, or descriptions they offered from one week to the next—or even at the same time—and learn first-hand how their customers would respond.

TEST TO FIND “WHAT WORKS”

Instead of having to *guess* what price point would make the most money, or which payment option would sell the most seed, the ability to gather data directly from the

market made it possible for these marketers to test and measure the impact of any choice (or guess), with lower risk.

Before sending out hundreds of thousands of catalogs to households across the U.S., direct marketers could test *multiple options* on samples of their customer base, and change their approach in response to what worked best.

The big difference for you is, what took the early direct marketers weeks to learn, you can learn almost instantly. You can set up a new offer, get it seen by people, and test the responses, all within a day, and at low cost.

The practice of direct marketing has fueled massive economic growth through the twentieth century. You can easily apply the same principles to your online marketing, to drive traffic and conversion.

The fundamental principle is to commit to testing different approaches, measuring the results, and altering your campaigns in response to what you learn about the way that people really respond.

The catch-phrase is “what works?” Very different to “first best guess”!

COMBINE CREATIVITY AND ANALYSIS

The new approach requires a combination of creativity and analysis. In marketing, and in web site optimization, just as in the scientific method, both processes are vital for making advances.

Creativity is forward-looking, asking “What could we do?” The creative process can only generate new future possibilities. It cannot tell you for sure which is best. Analysis looks backward and asks “Did that work?” It examines existing options and tells you which seems to work best. It cannot show the way to what might work even better.

The new approach to web design also calls you to think creatively about the scope of the problem. Challenging the singular approach is a typical example. Take the example of selling ice cream from a cart at the beach. If you were to test your market, asking which flavor people prefer, and discover that half your market likes vanilla best, would you stop selling any other flavors? Of course not.

Without sufficient creative exploration, site owners can sometimes go down a similar path. If you are stuck in viewing your site in singular terms, you may (quite rationally) find better results when your home page focuses on one particular feature over another.

For example, let's say you offer counseling services, which are useful for business professionals and for private clients who want success in some area. If you find that

the professional market is the more profitable, would you just stop offering your other services? No, it would be foolish to turn away good business.

The same goes for your web site. If you were placing a newspaper ad, it might make sense to focus on one service, but on the web you can easily create a page to address each market. The fact that a few more people respond to one angle than to another does not validate or invalidate any approach. The right approach is to reach out to all your markets, using multiplicity.

Multiplicity

Whereas the old approach to designing web sites was singular and generic, the key to transforming your success lies in *multiplicity*.

Imagine you go to a cocktail party. During the course of the evening, you meet twelve different people who, you discover, could benefit from the services your company offers. How many different conversations would you have with those people? Twelve! It would be crazy to give each person the same sales pitch, before you understand their problems and what their needs are.

Some of the people you speak to may know exactly what they want. Others may only have a problem with no idea how best to solve it. One may have heard of your business before. Others may not even know your industry exists.

That is how most web sites do business today. You have a singular home page, one single page for each product or service, usually a single page of frequently asked questions, and maybe another one for testimonials. All are woolly and generic, all telling the same story over and over.

As I mentioned earlier, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with these pages. They each have their place, providing one bundle of information to one type of inquirer. If that is all you have, one type of inquirer is all you'll get.

In the old approach to web design, most designers are still making web sites as though they are like advertisements or brochures.

In the old approach, we would treat web design as though space is expensive. Space is not expensive. It is very cheap. You can make as many pages as you have things to say.

In the old approach, we would design web sites as though they are fixed structures. They should not be fixed. They will usually have a fixed core of pages, but they should grow and adapt continually.

In the old approach, we would use the classic model of client-agency relationship. You need a designer to produce your ad or brochure. You brief the designer, he does the work, you pay him, and the job is done. This is not the best way to build web sites. A web designer who really gets it will help his client create a content strategy, to build a platform the client can use to add and update their own content continually, and to establish a relationship for ongoing design support. This benefits both client and designer.

The new approach does it very differently. Instead of relying on a small number of generic pages, you will create a range of specialized *landing pages*, each one designed to be found by specific types of visitors with their own specific needs. Each landing page can be an entry point into a different conversation.

All these conversations are arranged into a logical structure, which lead all types of inquirers to a selling proposition. And because people arrive at pages that *match closely what they need*, they will be more engaged, will have a higher level of trust, and will feel more optimistic about following the path forward that you provide for them.

If you want advice on saving for your child's college education, are you going to be more interested in a page that says "Tax advisor" or one that says "Advice on saving for your child's college education"?

You will see that, in order to follow the multiplicity approach, you will need to publish more pages. Fortunately, publishing online today is so cheap that cost is almost negligible, compared to the results that are available to you. The more you publish, the more conversations you can have with more different people, which is the key to optimization.

Steps for Optimizing Your Traffic

Put all these techniques and benefits together and you get a new picture of online marketing that is fluid and expansive. Instead of getting a web site built and hoping that people will arrive and buy, the new approach is an ongoing discipline that constantly looks for new marketing opportunities, creatively explores what the market responds to, and builds an ever-expanding network of content that continually reaches both wider and deeper to find new customers.

The sooner you start implementing these methods, the sooner your business will start to grow.

The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second best time is now.

CHINESE PROVERB

The rest of Part I of this book sets out the steps to follow to optimize the traffic coming to your site. It will lead you through every stage in order.

- ▶ Chapter 2 gives you a grounding in the principles of how search engines work, and how to optimize your pages for chosen terms. Basic search engine optimization is essential for a successful web site, and appreciating how search engines match queries to results will help you target and attract more visitors.
- ▶ Chapter 3 addresses the fundamentals of marketing. You will learn easy ways to identify new profitable markets that you can target using the multiplicity method.
- ▶ Chapter 4 introduces the *Awareness Ladder*, a model that you will find invaluable for further expanding your reach by addressing target markets in greater depth. Combining the Awareness Ladder with multiple markets gives your web site far greater reach.
- ▶ Chapter 5 includes worked examples that show you exactly how to combine all the methods of multiplicity and the Awareness Ladder, using real online businesses.

