

Foreword

Just about every business organization with any sense nowadays has a web site.

You've got to, because just about everybody with any sense goes on the Internet when they want to find out about something—especially if they are thinking of spending money.

Unfortunately, most websites are appallingly bad at what they are supposed to do: inform, influence or persuade as many people as possible.

But even if your site is a blessed exception, it isn't much use if hardly anybody ever visits it—which is true of the overwhelming majority of sites. As my old boss David Ogilvy observed, “You can't save souls in an empty church.”

That is why this book is a tremendous bargain.

First of all it is written in plain English, unlike a great many business books which seem designed to display the writers' polysyllabic dexterity rather than help the readers.

Second, it takes you logically through all the things you need to know to get more business—and more of the right kind of business—at the least cost.

Third, it is full of practical examples so you can easily relate to what the writer is talking about.

Read it once and you will learn a lot. Read it twice and you will start to think about many ways you can do better.

Then read it again and act upon what you have discovered. You will not regret it.

Drayton Bird

Drayton Bird Associates

Foreword

It wasn't that long ago that all the people who had confidence that the Internet could become a “real” medium fit around a small table.

I know because I was one of them.

You can't imagine how hard it was back the early 1990s to interest Silicon Valley and “interactive digital media” types in the Internet's commercial potential.

Of course today the Internet's impact and influence has far outstripped even the most wild-eyed predictions from those early days.

But a huge disconnect remains.

The Internet is a trackable medium, which means unlike print, radio, TV or just about any medium you can name, designers, and producers can actually see how their creations impact users.

Strangely, it's a very rare web designer who takes advantage of this simple, but game-changing fact.

The biggest reason for this is that—until now—no one has shown them how to track and test different approaches and made the case for why they should do it.

In writing this book, Ben Hunt has undertaken a task that few professionals in any field have the guts to tackle. He set aside his preconceptions about web design—ones that made him highly

successful—and looked at the subject with beginner’s eyes.

The result—this book—is as exciting as anything I’ve seen since Marc Andreessen added the image tag to HTML.

Internet design fads come and go.

The book you hold in your hands is a rock solid foundation you can build your future on.

Ken McCarthy

Founder, The System Seminar Organizer and sponsor of the very first web marketing conference

Introduction

In 2007, I wrote an ebook called “Save the Pixel—the Art of Simple Web Design,” which teaches that simplicity is the key to designing web pages that work. The book has sold more than 8,000 copies, and my agency Scratchmedia has become well known for the clean, spacious design style.

After I presented on simple web design at Ken McCarthy’s System Intensive seminar in 2008, I was asked what evidence I could share that proved the effectiveness of my approach. I was shocked to realize I had no numbers to prove that simplicity works!

I made a commitment to discover what really makes the difference between an ordinary web site and a great site. I devised a plan to make design fixes to a range of web sites. These fixes would address 50 common web design mistakes, which I thought would have a positive, measurable impact on the conversion rates of web sites (that is, what proportion of people took the action the designer intended).

I planned to test each of these changes across multiple sites and then to compare the results. These experiments would generate data that would prove which design factors make the most impact on conversion. I would publish the results in this book, to give other site owners a checklist of guaranteed fixes. I found several site owners who were willing to let my team experiment on their sites, and we set to work.

The project did not work out in the way I had envisaged. When I started out on this journey, I thought this book would be about graphic design. I discovered that graphic design is only one factor in what makes your site work—and a relatively minor one.

After running about 100 experiments on dozens of web sites, I discovered that it is possible to improve success rates on every web site—in many cases significantly! My team has more than doubled the conversion rates of several web pages on a range of sites, often through simple fixes to common problems.

My extensive research, and the results of our own experiments, have taught me that optimizing a web site goes much deeper than just simplifying its design. Yes, graphic design has a part to play in the success of your web site, but I have also discovered some far more powerful techniques, which you can start to implement today, and which don’t require graphic design skills!

Who This Book Is For

This is not the “50 Proven Design Fixes” book I intended to write. This is a guide you can use to transform the success rate of any web site. Its lessons will be useful to every web site owner, every marketer, every web developer, and every designer.

You need no particular creative or technical skills to apply the lessons in these chapters. Crafting

web sites that work comes down to a few simple disciplines, which I set out for you in a simple step-by-step guide.

This book is for everyone who has a web site that is failing, is just “doing okay,” or even doing pretty well. If you own a web site, or you are in charge of one, and you suspect it could be doing more, I think you are right.

Most web sites do not perform anywhere near their potential. They are not seen by enough of the right people. And when folks do visit the site, the vast majority leave again without getting what they want, or fulfilling the site’s goals.

Do not assume that this is the way it has to be.

Some web sites are found by more of the right people, and when those people come they take action. These sites do really well for their owners. Do they succeed because they look fantastic, or because they have had thousands invested in search engine optimization? No, that is usually not the case.

Web sites that work do a couple of things well: get seen by the right people, and make it easy for those people to find what they are looking for. This book tells you how you can do the same.

How to Use This Book

This book is organized into two parts. Part I shows you a simple process you can use to multiply the traffic to your web site. Part II gives you the techniques you need to get visitors to engage with your web site, and to continue to interact until they achieve what you want them to do.

I encourage you to start at the beginning and read through. There are hundreds of tips and tricks in these pages, but none of them alone will give you breakthrough results. When you understand the complete process of web site optimization, you will be ready to make a few critical changes that will transform your web sites, and a platform on which to build ongoing optimization.

Part I: Designing for Traffic

The way you structure your web site is the most important factor in attracting visitors. The first part of the book shows how most web sites do it wrong, and gives you a new approach to creating web sites that’s guaranteed to bring you much more traffic.

Chapter 1: How to Transform Your Web Site’s Success

describes what is wrong with the familiar approach to web design and why it is set up to deliver poor results. It introduces a new model for creating web sites that target more markets with greater precision.

Chapter 2: Search Engine Optimization Fundamentals

shows you how search engines work, and how to get your web site seen by more people.

Chapter 3: Expanding Your Reach

explains how to get out of your own point of view and take your customers’ perspective, multiplying the scope and impact of your web site’s message.

Chapter 4: Using the Awareness Ladder

gives you a simple but extremely powerful tool for visualizing your markets, addressing groups of prospects you have never reached before, and giving them exactly what they need to keep engaged

with your site.

Chapter 5: Working Through the Awareness Ladder

takes you through eight real-world case studies, and shows how you can apply the Awareness Ladder model to any marketing challenge.

Part II: Designing for Conversion

Getting people on your web site is great—but only if they complete your site's goals. I have spent two years researching and testing to discover what causes people to choose to say “yes.” Part II of the book gives you all the techniques you need to turn prospects into customers, including a simple three-step structure that gets people to take action.

Chapter 6: Making Your Site Sell

shows you how to model your site using conversion funnels so that you can spot where you are losing visitors, and what to do when you find leaks.

Chapter 7: Get Their Attention

gives you a toolkit of techniques for creating web pages that engage people's attention and encourage them to believe they are going to find what they want. This chapter addresses basic graphic design techniques, including layout, getability, and imagery, as well as essential tips for effective copywriting.

Chapter 8: Keep Them Engaged

is packed with techniques for ensuring people stay interested and carry on interacting with your web site, so that you can deliver a complete message. You will discover why you must present positive signs, build trust, and resolve concerns, so that visitors have no reason not to keep reading. It also explores ways to craft web pages that work for visitors with different personality types.

Chapter 9: Call Them to Action

highlights the critical difference between a web site that just engages and one that sells. Most web sites simply do a bad job of asking people to take action in a way that is timely and powerful. And it is no surprise that not enough people take action. Effective calls to action must be crafted. This chapter gives you six tips for crafting effective calls to action. It explains how to build momentum leading to each call to action, how to keep visitors moving forward from each page to the next, and how to get them over the crucial finish line. The tips are reinforced with examples of how you can use copy and graphics to maximum effect.

Chapter 10: Executing Your Web Site Strategy

gives you the complete step-by-step guide you need to put into action all the techniques in this book. Whether you are creating a new site, or working with an existing site, it tells you exactly what to do, in the right order, to start transforming your success.

Chapter 11: Optimizing Your Web Pages

shows how to test your web site's ability to convert visitors, using Website Optimizer, the popular free tool from Google. I give you a set of practical tips that we have learned the hard way, using these approaches on more than 70 of our own experiments over the past year.

How You Can Start to Transform Your Web Site's Success Today

The radical system I set out in this book will deliver incredible results. It will also challenge you. It will require you to look at web sites in a new way, and then you must put the lessons into action.

Most of your competitors will never take on the challenge to transform their web sites, because it is easier to keep doing things the way we have always done them. Right now, you have a great opportunity to gain a competitive advantage, which you can build upon every day. But it takes action.

The sooner you learn the lessons in this book—and apply them—the sooner you will start to see amazing results. They are just a few steps away. I invite you to turn to Chapter 1 now and take the first step.