Seven Essential Secrets for a Successful Web Presence

A White Paper from Katalyst Creative Group

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Introduction

A web presence is more than just a nice looking web site with fancy graphics or flashy pictures. It is a way to connect to your audience and draw them in.
An effective web presence provides a way to build trust in your organization.
It explains why what you have to offer is relevant to them.

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Our goal is to aid you in developing a more successful web presence. We will equip you to better reach your audience. The more educated you are in your approach the more likely you will be to succeed in your efforts. And ultimately, the more successful you will be in making your organization stand out in your unique marketplace.

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Secret One:
Setting Your Website Goals

Every website project should begin with a clear understanding of your goals. This is critical to maximize your web presence. These goals help guide many of your decisions for content, navigation, design/lay-out and features. Without them, your web site will lack a clear cohesion and focus.

What to think about when setting your goals

The best way to begin your goal setting is to ask some key questions:

- Why are you creating the website?
- What are you trying to achieve?
- How does your website fit within your overall marketing strategy of reaching your audience?
- How will you know if you've reached your goals?
- Are your goals clear? Are your goals measurable?

You should consider one or two primary goals and then some smaller goals within that.

There are many laudable goals for a website. You should consider one or two primary goals and then some smaller goals within that. Some potential high-level goals include:

- Generate leads for potential business
- Sell products or services
- To provide a centralized location for information about your organization.
- To improve customer service.

Measuring Your Goals

The best goals will be clearly measurable. Measurements come in different forms and include statistics from both the web site as well as other sources, such as call tracking logs or customer relationship management systems.

- Number of new visitors to the web site
- Number of visitors returning to the site
- Number of visitors downloading a white paper or form.
- Number of visitors completing a form such as an event registration or service request form
- Number of phone calls coming from your website

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Secret Two:
Target Your Audience

Once you have defined your goals for your website, you need to clearly understand whom you are targeting. Your primary audience will drive many of your decisions and priorities for your web site. The more you know about your audience, the more relevant you will be able to make your website and the closer you can align your site with their needs.

Audience Demographics

Begin this phase by looking at basic demographics for your audience. These will typically align with those of your organization. You need to address questions such as:

The more you know about your audience, the more relevant you will be able to make your website and the closer you can align your site with their needs.

- What vertical markets are you targeting?
- Who are you trying to reach?
- Are they older, younger, mostly male, mostly female, or a mixture?
- Is your audience primarily new prospects or returning customers?
- Why are they coming to your website?
- What information are they looking for?
- Are they technically savvy or likely to just have basic computer skills?
- Are they likely to access the site via a mobile device?

Appealing to your Audience

Make your site appeal to them. This should affect many of the decisions that you will make in the design process, such as:

- The personality of the copy/content
- What items go first in the navigation menus
- Information you highlight on the front page
- Content you put on your site
- The colors of the site & style of graphics
- The welcome message you select to present

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Secret Three:
Focus Your Content

Sites need substance and your target audience should drive content you provide. By keeping your focus on meeting your audience's needs, you will greatly improve the success of your web presence. So ask yourself… What is important to them? What do they need to know? What are they looking for on your site?

Do you know something that would be helpful to others?

No matter what industry you represent or what clientele you serve, you have a treasury of information you can pass along to others. Sharing quality content is important whether you are in the business-to-consumer or business-to-business arena.

When you are offering quality content that is well written and well presented, you can place yourself among the leading subject matter experts in your field. While you may not want to give away the recipe to your "secret sauce," there are plenty of other informational pieces that you may be able to share.

Do you have a desire for new customers?

Give them confidence that you can meet their needs and that you offer quality products or services. Include customer testimonials and other credibility enhancements such as awards, professional affiliations, and accreditations. Show them what really makes you stand out from the competition.

Would you like to draw continuing revenue from existing customers?

Maybe there's something new you have done since they came on board. What have they missed? Have you rolled out a new product or service? Are there new ideas for using your existing products? Tell them about it.

Are you concerned about customer service?

Add multiple ways for the customer to reach you. Perhaps you can find a way for them to track the status of their orders online? Allow them to submit service requests online. Think about providing online support such as a knowledge base, frequently asked questions, online documentation, or how-to videos.

Remember: content is king but your clients are the kingdom!

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Secret Four:
Express Your Inside Reality

Your web presence is a reflection of who you are. In many cases, it may be the only thing that your website visitors know about you. You need a professional quality web site that expresses who you are. It should reflect your own professionalism, quality, and personality in a way that is relevant to their needs.

Your website is often the starting point for expressing your brand. What does that mean? A brand is much more than your product or service and it's much more than your logo. A brand is the way your company is perceived, not just your company image, but the way your customers experience doing business with your company. That includes everything from the quality of your product and your customer service, to your company culture. Your brand expresses a promise that you are who you say you are. Your website offers the perfect opportunity to create a brand awareness for your audience. Here you can develop, express, and protect your brand.

[Your Website] should reflect your own professionalism, quality, and personality in a way that is relevant to their needs.

Speak to your audience in a way they can understand

Here are some things to remember:

- Show your visitors that your organization is relevant to them and why.
- Speak to your audience in a way that they can understand.
- Avoid too much jargon and language that your visitors may not understand.
- Keep your content short, to the point, and focused on your audience's needs.

Keep a consistent message and branding

Ideally, your site will also have a consistent branding with your printed materials, like mailers, t-shirts, advertisements, business cards, and any other printed material. That means using a consistent logo, colors, fonts, and images. A tag line that is used throughout your literature is another item to include for consistency. And don't forget about consistency between your favicon, email signatures, and your social networks like your Twitter pages and company Facebook fan page.

Secret Five:
Streamline Your Design

When looking at the mechanics of your site design, there are several areas that are critical to keep in mind.

Site Navigation

Clear, consistent navigation makes it easy for your visitors to find exactly what they need. Consider what they will most often look for on your web site and make sure those things are easy to find.

Consider including a "breadcrumb trail." A breadcrumb trail is a series of links, usually at the top of the body of the content, that show the visitor where they are within the site and allows them to quickly get back to the main section or the home page.

An example of a breadcrumb trail is "Home > Products > Hammer > B21 Wooden Hammer." Each of those words would be a link back to the bigger section. These help the visitor to know where they are at in your site. Remember that visitors often will come directly to one of your sub pages and so won't necessarily know how to navigate to other areas.

It is important to use headings and to keep the content short and to the point.

Page Layout

It is important to use headings and to keep the content short and to the point. This makes it much easier to scan a page to find specific information. Visitors will rarely be patient enough to read long, drawn out pages. Providing headings with short concise content allows your visitors to quickly get an idea of what the page contains and decide if they want to read further or move to another page.

Most designers design for a minimum 1024x760 resolution screen. If possible, keep your width to no more than 960 pixels wide. This helps to ensure that visitors won't have to scroll horizontally to read your text, which can really be annoying to your visitors. As mobile devices become more popular, you may want to consider "responsive design", which is a newer technique of making your site work on a larger variety of devices and screens.

Graphics and Other Design Elements

As they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. The appropriate graphics can make a world of difference in a web site. Graphics are not there to just look pretty, but instead should be chosen to increase functionality and to better convey your message.

Graphics should be optimized through a good graphics program, such as Adobe Photoshop, Fireworks or similar software. Some great free online tools are also available such as www.pixlr.com. They are able to optimize the file size of the image (not dimensions) so that it is small as possible and still look good on screen.

The smaller the file size, the faster the images will download. Quick downloads enable your visitors to find their information in a timely manner and make them less likely to hit the back button when they get tired of waiting for your site to load.

You will also want to consider the use of advanced elements, such as Javascript. Javascript can be used to create special effects such as rotating slideshows or expanding menus. These can be used with a good effect when used sparingly and appropriately. Be intentional about your use of these advanced elements. Never use them just because they are "neat." Be sure to test them extensively in different browsers and different computer operating systems before using them on your site.

Contemplate creating a printer friendly version. Some people remain more comfortable reading printed materials, but printing for other reasons may be required as well. Many content management systems can create a printer-friendly version automatically. It's more work for you but also more flexibility for your visitors!

Be Easy to Contact

One of the main purposes for your website is to encourage prospects and customers to contact you. So make it easy by providing multiple ways to contact you including phone, email, physical address, and fax. We recommend that you put your phone number and address at the bottom of every page in addition to the Contact Us page. You may also want to put your phone number in large, easy-to-see letters at the top of your page as well.

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Accessibility

Your web page should be accessible to as broad an audience as possible. People with vision impairments often will rely on various assistive devices, such as screen readers, which translate what is on the computer screen into automated audible output and refreshable Braille displays. Making your website accessible also has the added benefit of making it more accessible to search engines.

Avoid using graphical images for your menus or when displaying other text. This not only speeds the download time, but it also makes these items more accessible to people with vision impairments. Always use the "Alt Text" tag for any graphics that you do include. This allows the screen reader to read a textual description of the image.

Consider making your site, or portions of your site, available to wireless devices such as smart phones. Research currently shows that approximately one third of American Internet users have checked email or browsed web pages through a wireless connection. This number will only continue to grow. You do not want to miss out on capturing the attention of this type of user.

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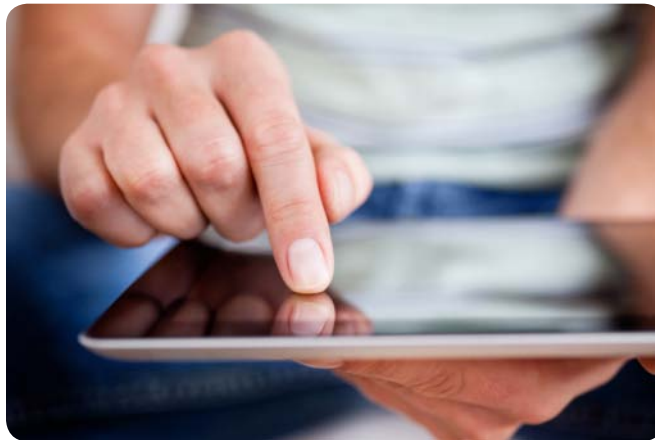
Secret Six:
Design to Increase Traffic

You want people to find you. Here are five primary areas to consider in promoting your site.

1. Search Engines

Search engines, such as Google and Bing, are still the primary means for finding information on the Internet. You will want to make sure that you do some of the basics for optimizing your site for search engine listings. If you already have great user-centered, quality content, you have come a long way.To better prepare your site for search engines, you will want to be sure and include the following:

- **Title tag on each page.** This is done via the "title" tag in the page headers. Be sure to include a descriptive title on every page. Put the most important words of the title up front because some search engines only look at the first portion of your page title. If you are a locally oriented business, this may include your city and state in your title.

- **Description meta tag:** In each page you are able to put a meta-description of that page, which is only visible when you look at the code for that page. Search engines and social media sites often display this information on the search engine results page. While this doesn't help you rank better in the search engine results, it can influence how many people click on your listing. Your description can be just a 2 to 3 sentence summary of what that page includes. It is also helpful to include a call-to-action within the description to help searchers choose to click on your listing instead of someone else's.

- **Headings within the content:** In your body, you should always use keyword rich headings. You should have the main heading set as a Heading 1 (H1) and then use Heading 2's and 3's as needed. This helps to make the page more scannable by your readers and also provides strong clues to the search engines of what is important on the page.

You will want to make sure that you do some of the basics for optimizing your site for search engine listings.

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2. Links from Other Sites

Links from other web sites not only draw direct traffic to your site but can also enhance your search engine ranking. Try to get listed in as many different quality sites as possible. It is particularly advantageous to look at any organizations or trade groups. These sites can be sites specific to vertical markets, local community activities and more. High quality websites are particularly helpful for links back to your site. Each link back to your site is like a vote, and some votes are more important than others.

3. Links and Likes from Social Media Sites

Search engines are increasingly picking up clues from social media sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Google Plus and Twitter. A strong social media strategy can help not only make more visitors and their friends aware of you, but also help to increase your search engine rankings as more people "like", share and recommend your website.

4. Printed Use of your web address

Be sure to include your web address on all printed communications, both internal and external. This includes your newsletter, advertisements, signs, promotional materials, press releases, business cards, letterhead, and any other printed item. People are often unwilling to call a phone number or they may want information when the office is closed. By widely distributing your web address you become more accessible to people wanting to know more about your organization.

5. Use your own branded email

A frequently overlooked method of advertising your web site is using your own branded email. When you use john.doe@aol.com instead of john.doe@katalystcg.com, you are advertising AOL or your particular Internet service provider, not to mention making your business look less professional. Why advertise AOL or MSN or Yahoo when you are communicating on your organization's behalf? By using your own web address for your email, you are advertising your own web site address and providing another way for people to contact you or find more information about you.

Each link back to your site is like a vote, and some votes are more important than others.

Secret Seven:
Include A Call To Action

Be sure to include a **call to action**. Encourage your visitors to call, email, download a whitepaper, subscribe to your newsletter, or participate in an upcoming event. You want to be warm, inviting, and welcoming to your visitors. Provide them with a way to connect to you and then ask them to connect.

Your call to action is a critical piece to your webpage. Help your visitor better understand what you would like for them to do and encourage them to take that next step.

Give them multiple ways to contact you:

- Contact Us form for email communication
- Phone number to call for more information
- Your address and directions to be able to find you
- The standard business hours and expected turnaround times.

Make you call to action creative; invite your visitors to respond to a special offer or for a unique service. Work to make your invitation attractive and interesting.

Help your visitor better understand what you would like for them to do and encourage them to take that next step.

Conclusion

We hope that this guide - Seven Essential Secrets of a Successful Web Presence - has given you some real insight into developing an effective web presence. Remember:

1. Set your goals
2. Understand your audience
3. Focus your content
4. Express who you are
5. Streamline your design
6. Design to increase traffic
7. And encourage your audience to respond through a call to action.

Have Feedback?

We welcome any comments or feedback that you have on this guide. Please email us at **info@katalystcg.com** with any suggestions or comments on how we can improve this guide. Our focus is to help you better reach your ultimate goals.

Can we help you?

And of course we would love to help you implement these strategies to achieve your business goals. Call us at **703-659-4416**.

Our focus is to help you better reach your ultimate goals. Contact us today!
Virginia: 703-659-4416
Texas: 817-900-8787

Katalyst Creative Group: About Us

At Katalyst Creative Group (KCG), we use a team approach to web development applying our core strengths in Graphic Design, Website Development, and Content Strategy. This way, through every step of our process, we develop a 3-dimensional view of your entire project from first idea to final delivery. When you work with KCG, you work directly with the principals, who are involved in every project to ensure that we maintain the highest quality and professionalism.

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Building Online Visibility and Value

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