Sportsplex Operators and Developers Association

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"Since 1981"

Smiles, Wisdom & Editorial
Comments For The Day !
- Special Reports -

NY Regional Office:
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Rochester, NY 14624-0617
(A Kansas 501C3 Corporation)

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The 7 deadly sins of web design . . . . .

Imagine a mall with two shops that sell nearly identical merchandise, for nearly identical prices. Both shops are conveniently located in the same area, clean, brightly lit and well-stocked.

But while the sales associates in one store are always friendly, knowledgeable and eager to help, the salespeople in the other store are consistently rude, lazy and uninformed. Which store would you think the people would be most likely to frequent? Guess what - it's the same for Internet consumers and websites.

How to drive away your site visitors, fast!

In a recent survey, 70% of respondents said that they would be unlikely to purchase from a website that annoyed them. In fact, they said they probably would never even go back to that site.

Even more people (74% of the respondents) said they would also likely unsubscribe from the company's promotions or messages - not only will they not be back, they don't ever want to hear from you again!

So what irritates these survey participants?

Here are their seven biggest pet peeves:

1. **Pop up ads** (93%)
2. **Being required to install extra software to view site content** (89%)
3. **Dead links** (86%)
4. **Confusing navigation** (84%)
5. **Required registration to access content** (83%)
6. **Slow-loading pages** (83%)
7. **Ineffective site search tools** (80%)

No news is not good news...

I hear you say, "We must be doing okay, or maybe our customers are different - we haven't heard many complaints at all!" Not so fast - the survey also revealed the following:

● **71% of the respondents** said they would be likely to look negatively upon a company whose site annoyed them

● **Over half (55%)** were likely to complain about the site to their friends and associates

● **Only 25%** said they would consider complaining directly to the company

And keep in mind, the percentage of people who consistently follow through with an actual complaint is probably much lower.

Remember how many times you've sworn to give somebody a piece of your mind, then just never gotten around to it? Just because you don't hear from these folks, don't assume they're not out there - and don't assume they're not annoyed!

And just as in our fictional town with two nearly identical stores, on the web the visitors you irritate into leaving can likely find your competitors' sites easily. In fact, they may already have one or more of your competitors' sites bookmarked.

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The 7 deadly sins of web design . . . . .

[- continued -]

Get your website back on the straight and narrow
The sad part is that so many of these 'sins' are easy to prevent or repair.
For instance:

● **Bury dead links** - Run a link-checker at least once a month on the links from your site pages, both to other pages within your site and to external websites. A number of alternatives are available to help you with this process.
Here are two:
? W3C Link Checker is a free online link checker service.
? Xenu's link sleuth is a free downloadable link checking software that's often recommended.

● **Check your site's usability** - This can be as simple as bringing in a few friends and relatives and giving them a simple assignment to complete using your site, then observing them (without 'helping' them!) while they try to accomplish the given task.

● **Speed up your page downloads** - Remember, not everyone has a T1 or a High-speed broadband connection. Make sure your pages aren't overloaded with superfluous graphics, Flash and scripted effects, and that the graphics and scripts you do use are optimised for web use. As a rule of thumb, your page graphics should work hard to earn their keep. If a page element is nothing but 'eye candy', particularly if it's large or slow-loading, consider dropping it entirely.

When you can commit these sins
Of course, some of the 'sins' have their legitimate uses. I can hear you gasp, "Are you saying we're doomed to failure if we commit any of these seven deadly sins? We need the information we get from our visitor registration! And our pop-ups get great results!"
Certainly, pop-up windows are sometimes highly effective at getting people to sign up for a newsletter or take advantage of a special offer. Gathering visitor contact information - say, before allowing visitors to download a popular white paper - can be a crucial part of an effective marketing campaign.
There are **two secrets to success** when using techniques such as these:

● **Make your offers so compelling** that people will overlook their annoyance in order to get to what you're offering. The idea is to get your visitors excited enough to overcome their initial aggravation. Just make sure that you deliver top quality information or products at the other end of the process, or your visitors will be doubly angry. Making people jump through hoops, for instance, to download a 'white paper' that's nothing more than a thinly-disguised sales pitch is just a plain old bad idea no matter how you slice it.

● **Use a light touch** - for instance, one small pop up instead of a dozen, and only on the person's first visit to your site. Try asking your visitors for only a name and an e-mail address instead of their whole life history before they download your white paper.
Also, you should realize that even when employed with delicacy and tact these techniques will probably still alienate a portion of your site's intended audience. Use them sparingly, and only when necessary. Sure, you can't please everyone, but you can make sure you're not going out of your way to unduly irritate people. Now, go forth and sin no more!

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The End . . .