



# “I Hate My Website”

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I hear this from virtually all of my clients. The reason is simple; most small-business websites aren't very good. Following are some common pitfalls that we see. How many apply to you?

**Don't do-it-yourself** – buying a circular saw at Sears doesn't make you Bob Villa, nor does a book on HTML make you a web designer. Hire a professional for this. After all, most people “check you out” on line before they hire you. If your site does not represent you well, change it. If you do not have a web site yet, what are you waiting for?! Even if you are adept at programming, you likely are not adept at graphic design – the two skills are usually mutually exclusive. An offshoot of this problem is looking around your staff and picking the one who is most computer savvy – Voila! – they are now your web master. The problem is, that person already has a full-time job, so he will always put a low priority on the internet work. We recently experienced this scenario with a client who owns a flooring store. His “web master” was a commission-based carpet salesman. Do you think he focused more on earning his paycheck every week or keeping the web site up to date? There are probably 40 web designers within a 5-mile radius of your office. Find one.

**Don't use clip art** – nothing shouts “I'm not really serious about this” like clip art. Use photographs, diagrams, renderings, etc., but please don't use free cartoons that you downloaded from the internet.

**Don't mismatch URL and email addresses** – if the contact information at [www.joesremediationservice.com](http://www.joesremediationservice.com) lists [remediationguru69@hotmail.com](mailto:remediationguru69@hotmail.com) as the email address, visitors will question your professionalism. You can always have your website email forwarded to your preferred email address. This way

you can stick with checking only one account, but people will not doubt your professionalism.

**Not having at least a landing page** – if you don't yet have a website, you should at least purchase a URL (less than \$20) and establish a landing page. This could be one page of text that shows your mailing address, phone, and email contact. You could also establish a presence on one of the internet yellow pages such as [www.yellowbook.com](http://www.yellowbook.com). On these sites, you get the benefit of search engine access without even having a website. For about \$30 per month, you can advertise your name, address, phone, etc. (even a map of your location) under certain keyword categories by which visitors search.

**Too much flash** – occasionally, one of the little movie clips at the beginning of someone's website will be interesting. Much of the time, however, these flash animations are just annoying. I almost always skip them (if that is an option) to get to the meat of the site. Most people are too busy to sit through a little video – they just want to find the information they came for. Moreover, there is one other pitfall with flash sequences on the opening page – they can make it difficult for some of the search engines to find relevant information on your site.

**Too much me, not enough you** – web visitors want to know what you can do for them. They don't necessarily need to know how great you are. Show them examples of how you helped someone solve a problem and let them figure out how great you are. It means a lot more to them when they figure it out for themselves. Show don't tell.

**Too much blah, blah, blah** – be succinct.

**Not updating the site** – it is usually obvious when you have not updated your site. If there is old information on the site, visitors are left to conjecture whether you are too busy or disinterested in keeping it up to date. If you are too busy to manage your web site, will you be too busy to help them with their problem?

**Horizontal scrolling** – if the visitor has to move a scroll bar to see the rest of the information to the right on the screen, it shows a sloppy design. They should be able to see the entire page on any browser.

**Inconsistency** – does the web site match the personality of your business? To use that same flooring company I mentioned previously, their showroom is very warm, inviting, and professional. It would easily appeal to the discerning buyer. However, their web site had a “discount” feel and gave the impression of customers walking through a cold, vast warehouse picking out their own carpet. Your site is your window to the world, it needs to reflect you accurately.

**Nothing words** - do you use “nothing” terms such as “State-of-the-art”, “best”, “cutting edge”, “commitment to customer service” without really supporting them? I call these nothing words because everyone uses them. When everyone uses them, they're really worth nothing to the prospective client or customer.

**Not submitting to the search engines** - did you submit your site to the search engines? Have you provided the necessary metatags for each page for the search engines? Have you seriously thought about the words prospective clients use when searching for your type of service? Do you link to other sites and have them link back to you (search

engines like to see this)? Search engine optimization (SEO) is a burgeoning business because it is so important. You have to make it easy for people to find you.

**.net instead of .com** – sometimes you cannot avoid this, because so many .com URLs are taken, but you should really try to avoid using the alternate extensions. For example, if [www.joesremediationservice.com](http://www.joesremediationservice.com) is taken, do not use [www.joesremediationservice.net](http://www.joesremediationservice.net). It's too confusing and you will end up driving clients to your competitor's site. Instead, try something unique that relates to the benefit you provide, such as [www.remedialcompliance.com](http://www.remedialcompliance.com).

## The Cobblers Kids are Shoeless!

Okay, here's where I come clean. One of the primary motivations for this commentary about ineffective websites is the ineffectiveness of my own. Although we advise clients on how to improve their sites, ours is...well, embarrassing. It violates many of the rules I have enumerated here. The fact is we just don't have the time to devote to our own site, and with a very localized focus for our business, the website has never been a priority. But that has to change, because "do as I say, not as I do" is not appropriate for a business consultant.

So we have embarked on the early stages of updating the site, with many of the strategies we present to our clients. With any luck, the new site will be up by the time you receive this issue. If that is the case, you will be able to view the old site by simply typing "/old" at the end of our web address. So it will be [www.milkyourmarketing.com/old](http://www.milkyourmarketing.com/old). We have been meaning to overhaul this site for well over a year. I hope that calling it to the attention of a national audience will give me sufficient motivation to make it happen. Drop me a line and let me know what you think.

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