The *14 Elements* of a
Successful Website

Contents

Introduction

Have you spent years honing your craft, but need help finding you niche? Are you a passionate, highly gifted individual ready to make a difference in the world, but you don't know how to get your message out there?¬ Does creating your online empire bring up fears of feeling overwhelmed by the task, not enough time, lack of clarity and cost?

Here at WTS Web Design, we understand these issues and what it takes to be successful online. We have designed this FREE REPORT to help make this important process easier and to help you get started!

After reading this report, you will understand:

1. What the major components of a successful website are

2. What you should focus on first

3. What will make the most difference

4. Where most people go wrong

So here we go…

1. Quality Web Hosting

Your web host is the foundation of your site. So many people and web developers overlook this key piece. Many people just look for the cheapest deal figuring that all we hosts are basically the same. This is NOT true. WTS has worked with every major web hosting company out there, and we can tell you that there is a lot variation in services.

While cost is a consideration, there are many other things to consider as well such as:

1.   *Site Speed:*

Some web hosts have faster access times than others. This can be due to their network infrastructure or how many websites they pack onto each shared server. This isn't just about user experience. Among the many things that Google and other search engines take into account when determining your site ranking is site speed. Faster speeds will contribute to a better ranking. If purchasing "shared hosting", find out if the provider has a tendency to over allocate their servers. If you are developing a site with Wordpress, find out if your host has dedicated Wordpress hosting.

2.   *Reliable Service:*

What is the reported uptime of their service? Is it 100%, 99%, 98%, or less? Just like site speed, the amount of uptime your site has also impacts your sites ranking.

3.   *Available Features:*

What features come standard with your package? Does it come with a free domain name? Does it have important features like "backups" standard or are there extra fees for such services? Look for companies that offer features like included backups.

4.   *Flexibility:*

In the beginning you may only need to host a simple site. However as your business and your site grow, you may need more options. Some low cost shared hosting solutions limit things like disk space, number of process you can run, number of concurrent connections and more. Look for companies that offer a wide array of software solutions and options that allow your site to grow with ease.

5.   *Easy Upgrade Path:*

If you outgrow your current hosting plan, is there an easy way to upgrade? Some hosts will simply allow you to add resources to your account for an additional monthly fee. However, some will require you to migrate to a new server. This is ok, if they do it for you at no cost. However, sometimes they will charge you to have one of their engineers migrate you or you will have to pay your own developer to do it. Look for companies that have an easy no to low cost upgrade path.

6.   *Cost:*

Last but not least is cost. The old adage often applies here as well: "You get what you pay for." We don't suggest that paying a lot for hosting always means you are getting more. In fact there have been many instances where we have recommended a client move because they were being over charged for services they didn't need and weren't using. However, those bargain basement services usually don't meet our standards either. Look for companies that have the above features for a reasonable cost.

2. Good Domain Name

There is more to selecting your domain name than coming up with a cute name or phrase. Start first by thinking about your business and your industry. If you are selling widgets, than it would be a good idea to include the keyword widgets in your domain name ex: www.smart-widgets.com. To find the proper keywords, you will need to have an expert do proper keyword research for you (see SEO below). This is also a factor that Google and search engines use to determine ranking.

Next think about your branding. Is your company name a brand? Is your name your brand? Sometimes your brand is your keyword.

One question we get a lot is what top level domain should you use (.com, .net, .org. etc). In the past, .com ruled the web! If you didn't have a .com, you were at a disadvantage. However, this is no longer the case.

There are many different top-level domains now and people are used to many of them. Our recommendation is to pick one that is relevant to your business. If you are a commercial for profit business, try to get .com, .net, .biz or something similar. If you are a non-profit, try a .org.

3. Website Platform

What is a website platform. This means the software that runs your site. Is it HTML, PHP, Joomla, Drupal, Wordpress, etc.?

While all of the above are valid options and have their place, they are not all created equal. Which one you choose depends on your needs. Let's separate them into two groups.

The first group contains HTML/PHP. These sites are completely custom and built from scratch. They require a software coder to write the code. The benefits of these sites are that they can be written to meet any needs you may have and they (if designed well) generally scale very well as you grow. The downsides of these sites are that they are generally much more expensive and take much longer to develop. These sites are usually well suited for larger companies with complex needs and ample funding.

The second group contains what we call CMS Systems (Content Management Systems) such as Wordpress, Joomla and Drupal. All of these are content management systems and are free to use (Note: Many people confuse the paid hosted version of Wordpress with the free software that you run on your own host). Here at WTS Web Design we recommend Wordpress. The reason for this is because of its popularity and because of the development environment that has developed around it. Think of it as similar to what iTunes did for the iPod and music. Early on when MP3 players came out, there were many different brands to choose from. Eventually the iPod took over not because of its good looks, but because of the iTunes infrastructure that made buying, syncing and listening to digital music easier than on any other device. The same is true for Wordpress. There are now so many themes, plugins and third party integrations available for Wordpress, that you can customize your site with all the functionality you could ever need. Wordpress is hands down the most extensible CMS out there. Furthermore, there are many talented Wordpress experts (and a lot of hack's as well, so choose your developer wisely) who can design, create and support your site.

3. Website Platform

Our recommendation is to use Wordpress unless you have specific needs that require you to develop a custom HTML/PHP site.

4. Quality Premium Theme

If Wordpress is your chosen platform, then you will also need a Theme. A theme is basically a template that allows you to control the look and feel of your site and also adds functionality. There are many free themes as well as paid themes. Let's discuss the differences.

Free themes: Wordpress.org provides several free themes. The advantages of these are that they are free and that they are created and supported by Wordpress itself. This means you can guarantee they will be compatible with Wordpress and that they will not have any hidden code in them. Wordpress.org also maintains a searchable database of free themes you can choose from. In addition there are many other web-sites; which offer free themes. Remember that old adage "you get what you pay for." Many of these other free themes have hidden software in them. At best the hidden code is just advertisements for the company that wrote the theme. At worst, they can contain malicious software that is bad for your site visitors and will negatively affect your Google ranking. One more thing to consider as well with free themes is that support if something goes wrong or updates for security holes are needed they are often slow and sometimes non-existent.

Paid or "Premium" Themes: Premium themes are written by individuals and software companies and sold as for profit products. These themes generally have many more options than free themes. They allow you to control the look and functionality of your site much better. The software producers also tend to release much more frequent updates to address security issues, bugs, and add new functionality. In addition to this, support is also generally good. This means that there is little chance of your theme becoming incompatible with the latest version of Wordpress.

WTS We Design recommends using a quality premium theme for all sites. It may cost a little more, but it is absolutely worth it.

5. SEO (Search Engine Optimization)

SEO is one of those buzzword acronyms that many think they understand, but few actually do. In short SEO is the practice of constructing and optimizing a site to maximize its search engine ranking. There are a lot of misconceptions about SEO. Many website developers claim to know SEO, but in reality only know a few basic best practices. One of the reasons for this is that Google (the largest search engine) uses a proprietary algorithm to determine ranking and does not disclose how the algorithm works. So what SEO experts know is mostly gained by trial and error. Trying different strategies until you find what works.

SEO starts with doing proper keyword research. Keyword research consists of brainstorming a list of key words that relate to you subject or industry and then researching the average monthly search volumes for those terms. Many times the words you thought were the best ones, turn out to be not so good or not as good as other options. This can be a long and tedious process especially if you don't understand the metrics you are looking at. To make this even more difficult, Google has taken away access to their "keyword planning" tool. Given the critical nature of this part of the website design process, WTS Web Design recommends hiring a professional for this step.

Once you have your list of keywords, the next thing to do is to incorporate them into your content. The trick is to achieve the proper keyword density without overdoing it! Page titles, headings and page URL's are also good places for keywords.

If you are using Wordpress, the next thing to do is to install a good SEO plugin. There are many to choose from and some are definitely better than others! Installing this plugin will allow you more control of the meta data that Google uses and can definitely improve your ranking.

A comprehensive SEO strategy can include much more than what we have covered here. Comprehensive strategies are usually custom designed for each unique situation.

6. Quality Content

A website is really only as good as its content. This is another crucial step. No matter how good your SEO is, if your content is low quality, your ranking will be low as well. Much of Google's algorithm is designed to ensure that searches return quality relevant content. What makes for quality content?

1.   Relevance: The first thing is relevance. Is your content relevant to the topic of your site? If your site is about widgets and your content is about gadgets, that's not really relevant and Google will realize that.

2.   Keyword Density: Next is keyword density. Remember when we talked about SEO above? Well once you have your keyword research, you want to use those words in your content. The trick is to use them without over using them. If you simply stuff your content full of keywords (especially if they are not relevant), it can actually penalize you in the rankings. Over the years developers have come up with all sorts of tricks to fool Google and Google catches on quick. So use your keywords often and appropriately.

3.   Content Quantity: While quantity is not always better than quality, having a significant amount of content will also help your rankings. Google is much more likely to recommend your site if you have more relevant keyword dense content than your competitors.

4.   Strong Sales Pages: Let's face it most websites are selling something; either a product or a service. If you are selling something, you need to have strong sales pages. Strong sales pages are pages that use the most effective current sales strategies. These can be difficult to create and the sales strategies change frequently. WTS web Design recommends hiring a professional to create professional sales pages that actually convert.
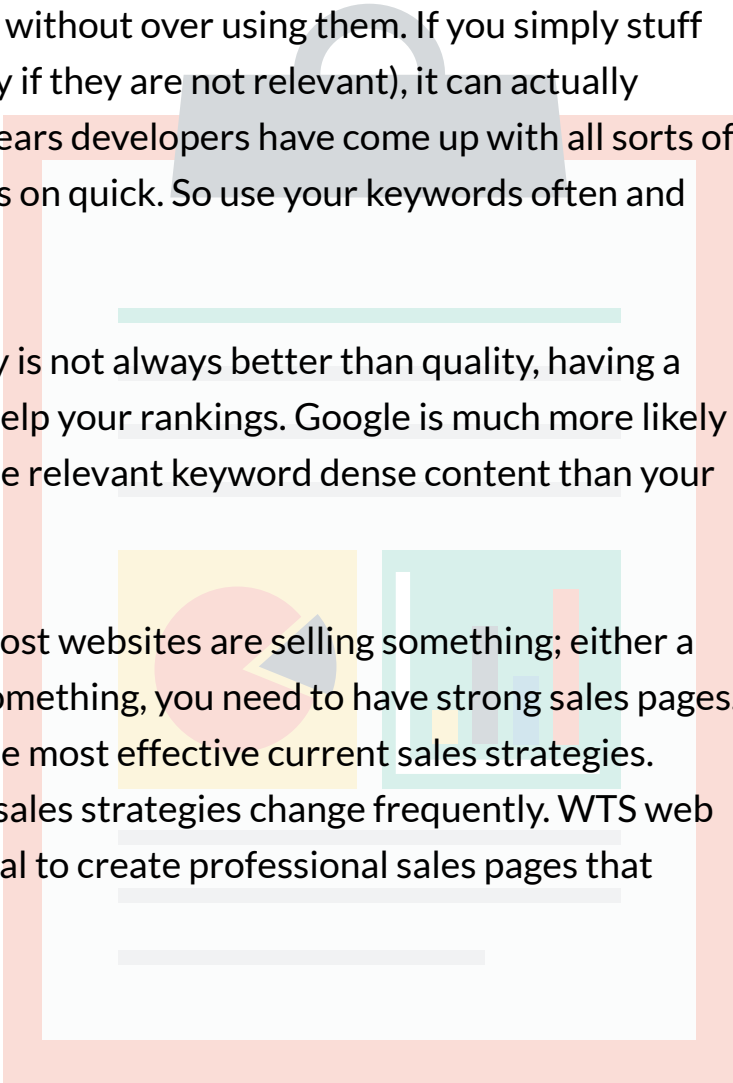
7. High Quality Images/Videos

Images are a great way to improve your rankings! There are huge amounts of searches for images on every topic. If you have legal relevant images with proper alt tags, you can significantly increase your rankings. One key here is that you must have the rights to use the images. WTS Web Design recommends purchasing images from a stock photo site. This legally allows you to use the images and will also provide you with much higher quality images than you usually find on the web. If you alt tag them appropriately, you have a good chance of having your sites images come up high in a Google "Image" search. This can be used to drive a lot of traffic to your site.

Like images, videos can be used in a similar manor. Do you know who the 2nd biggest search engine behind Google is? It's Youtube! Yes the video site is actually the second biggest search engine in the world! You can create a Youtube channel for your business and upload relevant videos. When adding a video, you can tag the video with appropriate keyword tags and link back to your website. Once this is done, you can them embed the videos into your website. Using this strategy, you significantly increase your business/site/product/service visibility.

8. VFO/Email Capture

Another important piece of a successful website is capturing the names and emails of potential clients so you can send them valuable offers in the future. To capture emails successfully and properly you will need a few things. First you will need a Contact Management System such as MailChimp, Aweber, Constant Contact, etc. A Contact Management System will provide the code to actually capture emails and add them to a database that you can then later use to send emails. In today's day and age, you must use a CMS! The days of putting lots of email addresses in the Bcc field of your email are over. Those emails will immediately get flagged as spam and never make it to your potential clients! CMS systems will require you to comply with the "CAN-SPAM Act" and that is a good thing. This will help ensure that your emails actually get to your intended customers.

Once you have your CMS set up, you will need a VFO. Since we are already using old adages, here is another one: there is no such thing as a free lunch. If you want someone to give you something valuable like his or her email address, you need to offer something of value in return. VFO stands for "Valuable Free Offer". This is something (usually a digital download of something like this report) that is free, valuable to the customer and given in exchange for the email address. The key to VFO's is that they have to have value! If you offer something poor, people will simply unsubscribe from your list and you will lose them. Create something that gives your customers value. Other examples can be reports, e-books, audio recordings and videos.

9. E-Commerce Solution

If you are selling a product whether it is digital or a physical product, you will need an e-commerce solution. E-commerce solutions generally fall into two categories: third party hosted and integrated.

1. *Third Party Hosted:* Third party hosted solutions are shopping cart systems that are hosted by a third party on their servers such as Shopify or Magento. The advantage of these solutions is that the provider assumes responsibility for complying with security regulations governing financial transactions. The provider also assumes responsibility for keeping the software up to date so there is little you have to do to keep your shopping cart up and running. They also usually provide payment gateway services included so you don't have to pay for that separately. The down side is there is a monthly cost.

2. *Integrated:* Integrated e-commerce solutions are shopping cart systems that run directly on your website such as WooCommerce. These systems allow you more control over how you configure them and do not have monthly fees. The downsides are that they can be more complex to set up, require a separate payment gateway/gateways, and that the maintenance of the software is your responsibility.

10. Professional Design

Even if you decide to go the do-it-yourself route, WTS Web Design recommends hiring a professional to do the design. This is an often over looked aspect.

The look and feel of your site can have a lot to do with its success. It's not just about looks, but also architecture and usability. Having a professional create a beautiful and usable design can make your site stand out from your competition.

11. Security

Website security is very important these days. The popularity of Content Management Systems has advantages like robust development and strong support, but it also has a downside. This downside is that the more popular something is, the bigger the target it becomes for hackers. Therefore website security is very important. If your site gets hacked, you may lose data, your site may go off-line, and/or your rankings may significantly suffer. Google will "Blacklist" your site if they determine that your site is infected with malware.

Here are some general security tips:

1.   Do not use admin as the default login for your sites admin page. Pick another name that will not easily be guessed.

2.   Make sure you have a strong password that includes upper and lower case letters, numbers and special characters.

3.   Use a security plugin or service to secure your site.

4.   Keep all software up to date as frequently as possible. This includes Content Management System software like Wordpress, themes, and plugins.

12. Analytics

Analytics are a must for a successful website. This is an aspect many people know nothing about. Every website must be set up with Google Analytics! This is the best way to monitor your site and gain valuable information. The information gained through analytics can be invaluable in determining how your site is performing and what you can do to improve it. One word of caution though: setting up analytics is one thing, understanding the data is another. This is another area of web design in which hiring a professional is extremely valuable. Information is only as valuable as your understanding of it. There can be an enormous amount of data in Google Analytics and it can seem overwhelming. A professional can help you understand it and make recommendations based on that data.

13. Ongoing Maintenance

One more element of a successful website that is often over looked is ongoing maintenance. Today's websites have many different pieces of software running on them and are under constant attack from hackers. To make sure that everything continues to run smoothly and safely requires ongoing maintenance. Websites need to be updated on a regular basis. While sometimes this is as simple as clicking a button, it is often times much more complex. Updating one piece of software can sometimes negatively affect another. This can cause your site to either malfunction or go offline completely. In the Wordpress world, we call it the "White Screen of Death". While this section is not intended to scare you, it is intended to bring awareness to the fact that things can and do go wrong. Updating a site should be done cautiously and with care. One great advantage to having a professional perform your ongoing maintenance is that if something does go wrong, they can quickly fix the problem with minimal down time. WTS Web Design offers Ongoing Monthly Maintenance Services.
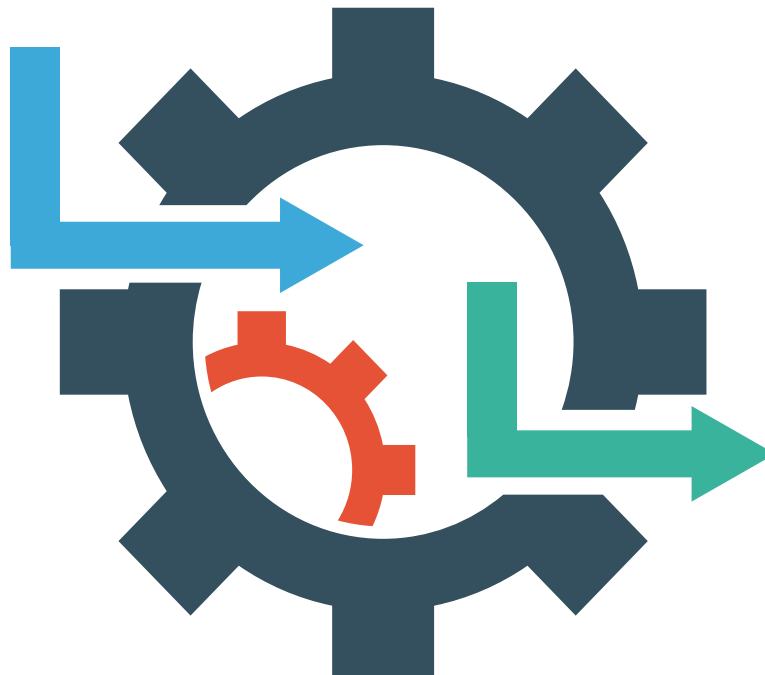
14. Hire A Professional

The last element of a successful website is hiring a professional. While with enough time, study, trial and error many can get a website up and running, a professional can do it much faster with significantly better quality. Professionals have the experience and knowledge to take you site to a higher level. A successful website is a combination of many factors and a professional works with these factors every day. As with all services, there is a wide variation in skill and quality of professionals in the web design industry. Do your research and choose wisely. Remember the old adage we have mentioned several times: you get what you pay for.

For more information on WTS Web Design's services,

please visit http://www.wtswebdesign.com