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Your Web Site ROI, Part 1

BY CRAIG PARK, FSMPS, ASSOCIATE AIA

Here's a too common scenario: The CEO charges you and your marketing team with creating a new Web presence. Your old Web site is stale, static, and honestly boring; not much more than a bad brochure. You want compelling, engaging, and creative—reflecting the great work of your design, engineering, consulting, or contracting practice. You want it to have cutting-edge graphics, to be visually and content dynamic, database-driven, easy to navigate, and easy to update and have multiple reasons for users, clients, and potential clients to return, again and again.

So you spend a ton of time, a ton of money, hire an award-winning graphics/Web design firm, learn everything you don't need to know about ASP, CSS, PHP, RSS, SOP, SQL, XML, dotNet, JavaScript, Flash, and more (and you thought it was just about HTML). You code (or have coded), test, re-code, retest, beta-launch, officially launch, and... wait.

The boss loves the site: It's "cool." Your peers and friends love it, saying it is "killer," "sweet," "awesome," "tight," or even "epic;" your mom thinks "you are a genius" (but then again, she always did). The designers enter your site in the SMPS Marketing

Communications Awards program (the ultimate goal), and "win," thus validating their role.

The only problem, no one comes to the site. Well, a few...your boss, your employees, your competitors, and your mom. But no one stays, and worse, no new business can be linked directly to having a Web site at all. Now the CEO wants to know what the company is getting from the six-figure "investment in the future," and your job, career, and self-esteem are all on the line.

What will you do, what will you do?

Web site ROI and search engine optimization

The causes of your pain are two inter-related problems. First, you didn't lay the groundwork for expected return on investment (ROI) in time or dollars relative to impact, so no one can agree on what makes a successful site. Second, you designed it, you built it, but no one can find it because you failed to consider the technicalities of optimizing your site so that the search engines (the number one way people find sites) can: 1. find you at all, 2. index (spider) your site, and 3. put you at the top of their list.

Part 1 of this series addresses the first problem.

Measure what matters

The most important question you should ask before you start a new Web site or an update of a site is, "What should we measure?" If the goal is "awareness," the answer may be one thing. If the goal is "sales," the answer will be something completely different. It is critical to spend an equal amount of time: 1. identifying goals and 2. determining which images, navigation, colors, or content will be included. The answer to "What should we measure?" will lay the foundation for the direction you take to reaching your most important goals.

The second question to ask is, "How do we measure?" To be sure, there are a myriad of things you can measure, including: hits/day, browsers used, country of origin, entry point, exit point, length of session, etc. This question is usually driven by upper management believing that "traffic" is the only gauge of



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To earn one CEU toward Certified Professional Services Marketer (CPSM) recertification, go to www.smeps.org and click on "Certification" and then "Recertification" to access questions about this article. Answer the questions on a sheet of paper titled "June 2007 *Marketer*: Your Web Site ROI, Part 1 (1 CEU)." Retain this document and submit it with your other CEU documentation by your CPSM recertification date.

If you have questions about this program, please contact SMPS National at 800.292.7677, x232.

a successful site. However, it's one thing to get the audience to come, it's quite another to get them to engage, to communicate, and maybe even to buy. At the end of the day, experts agree three metrics are the ones that will tell you if your site is successful: Clickthroughs, pageviews, and revenue.

- **Clickthroughs** tell you where people are coming from: advertising, affiliates, search engines, etc. How easy is it to find your site (answer in Part 2)?
- **Pageviews** tell you what people are looking at. The more pages, the deeper into the site they go, the better.
- **Revenues** represent the “bottom line,” whether that means actually buying or measured by registering, downloading, calling for an appointment, or whatever your firm has set as its engagement metric.

Where are they from?

Starting with clickthroughs: Where do people come from? Drivers to your site come from all the marketing you do to promote the site. That can include banners on professional association and client association sites (your sponsorship dollars at work); pay-per-click ads on Google, Yahoo!, or MSN Search; e-ads in industry e-newsletters and e-zines; and links from your affiliates (that's right, you can co-promote/cross-market with your consultants). It's important to keep a calendar showing when those promotions start and end so that you can optimize visibility in the marketplace.

There is also all the offline, print advertising, and promotional work you do. (Is your site URL on every piece of collateral material produced by your marketing department?) Special-purpose direct mail promoting special events, new information (a breakthrough “whitepaper”), or the hiring of a new designer (and his or her portfolio) can give people a reason to visit and dig deeper than the typical cursory view.

Another driver might be an ad on the radio with the announcer saying, “www dot your company dot com”. (I'm hearing more and more building industry firms supporting NPR and getting promotional time on the air.) We're not quite there yet, but soon we may even see a 30-second spot on TV with “www.your company.com/discoverychannel/megastructures” promoting your firm's role on a new super stadium. With this data cataloged, you can chart them against clickthroughs, pageviews, and online-based revenue.

ROI on clickthroughs can be measured by the cost of all your Web-oriented promotions divided by the volume of traffic to the site as \$/clickthrough. Little numbers are good, big numbers are bad. Oh, did I mention that not many firms are actually doing any Web-oriented promotions? So that would be a good first step.

Reference sources for more information on good Web site design:

⊕ Advanced Common Sense	www.sensible.com
⊕ Creating Killer Web Sites	www.killersites.com
⊕ usability.gov	www.usability.gov
⊕ useit: Jakob Nielsen's Web Site	www.useit.com
⊕ Web Page Design for Designers	www.wpdfd.com
⊕ Web Sites That Suck	www.Websitesthatsuck.com

What are they looking at?

Traffic comes to your Web site for a lot of reasons, so while clickthroughs are important, pageviews are even more important. Charting the depth and breadth that an individual travels through your site gives a good indication of what's interesting and what's fluff.

If your site's content remains, for the most part, an electronic version of your brochures, don't expect too much. Providing a registration form, even for the “free stuff,” is a good first step. Setting up a more detailed registration for something they can only get from you (e.g., a survey of building costs related to investment in sustainability) and then following up. Proactively inviting the viewer to “learn more” and using that captured data to inform your business development staff is key. Like all communication, timely response by your BD staff is critical.

A few years ago I was researching CRM systems for my firm and registered on the Pivitol Web site (www.pivitolcrm.com) to download a whitepaper. Within a half hour, I had a call from the regional sales manager inquiring whether the whitepaper was helpful, did I have any questions, and whether I would be available for a meeting so he could discuss our needs. While their technology was geared more toward manufacturing than service, to this day, I am still impressed with that responsiveness and client-focused attitude.

If your site provides engaging and important research, benchmark data, or design guidelines that inform the viewer on issues that are important to them (reminder: “It's not all about you!”), then you have something of value to share. While sharing doesn't necessarily mean pay-to-view, it is a very reasonable expectation

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business development

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Success is based on your plan, not your relational tendencies

You are not going to succeed at networking just because you were born an extrovert. It is time to sit down and write out a list of your top 10 key relationships that are poised to help you succeed. Then take those top 10 relationships and start focusing on introvert networking; that is, developing meaningful relationships with each of those people and focus on how you can help each of them succeed. **M**



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for the viewer to provide some minimum contact data in order to receive the value you are offering. That information takes you one step closer to “conversion.”

The bottom line

Conversion is the Holy Grail for Web sites. Generating click-throughs, stimulating multiple (and targeted) pageviews, and driving new revenue by converting that viewer into a buyer should be your ultimate goal (and then seeing those numbers increase month over month, year over year), and all your worries will be forgotten (well, almost all).

Realistically, no one is going to “buy” a professional service from a Web site, but they might be engaged (and converted) in such a way that you can talk to them, meet with them, learn more about them, build a relationship with them, and then be in a position to “sell” them your service.

So even if you have an integrated, updated picture of everything your company does in the way of marketing and advertising, which is logistically challenging, and you tie that information back to how viewers navigate to and through your site, which is logically challenging, you still face the age-old reality of professional services marketing: It’s all about relationships.

So the bottom-line ROI on your Web site can be, and should be,

measured by “face time.” How many new contacts has your site delivered, and what is the conversion of those contacts by your business development staff into one-to-one, or one-to-many, phone calls, meetings, and presentations to new potential clients.

At the end of the day, it’s pretty simple: See what people did just before they showed up and figure out how to get more of them to do that. Then provide plenty of “value” for them to look at and develop a conversion strategy to get “real time” with them. And you thought your job was just to drive traffic to your site. Not anymore.

*In the next column, I’ll continue with “Web Site ROI, Part 2” and look at search engine optimization and the impact it has on getting found. **M***



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