



Introduction

Your website is your stand-in when you can't be there.

As a business owner, you probably would like to be available, in person, to speak with everyone who might be remotely interested in your products and services. After all, you can do a much better job of that than anyone else. But you can't be everywhere all the time.

Let's say it's 11:45 PM, and you're in bed asleep. But at that same time there are other people who are wide awake, sitting at their computers, looking for a product or service much like yours.

And they stumble upon your website.

And they have questions.

And you're in bed asleep.

Who's going to handle their questions?

Answer? Your website.

When you're not available, your website is your stand-in, your duly-appointed representative, and your authorized agent.

So you better have a website that does a good job of that. If you hired a salesperson, or anyone in any capacity that represented your business, you'd be very careful to hire someone who represented you well.

Is your website representing you well?

Radical Rules for Websites

Why would I refer to this list of ideas as "radical"? They shouldn't have to be thought of as radical. They should be mainstream, taken for granted, not necessary to discuss because everybody is aware of them and applies them every day, kind of like breathing.

But that doesn't happen. If the ideas here were all adopted and practiced all the time, I wouldn't need to create this list or write this book.

Let's make this whole website thing simpler for you:

- There is a list of website practices that, if you did them consistently, would move you in the direction of having a fabulous website.
- There is another list of practices that, if you did them consistently, would move you in the direction of having a crappy website.
- I have herewith combined both of those lists into one.
- You need to first know all the things you should **not** do, and not do them.
- This list by no means represents *everything* that you need to know about websites, but it's a really good start, and if you digest everything that's said here, you'll be more knowledgeable about websites than 99% of the population.
- The items and ideas in this list are presented in no particular order of importance.



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Your website is the public image of your organization.

People get an impression of who you are, what you are, what you do, what you offer, and what you stand for, not so much from talking to you on the phone, or from printed materials, or from media advertising, but from your website.

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Your Home page must immediately answer the question, "What is this place?"

The first-time visitor wants to know who you are and what you're about before anything else, and they want to know it quickly and concisely. You need to be able to describe, on your Home page, as concisely as possible, using as few words as possible, what your business does, who it does it for, and why someone might be interested in your business.

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Creating a good website is a process, not an event.

It must be an ongoing program of constant improvement. Although a complete remake every year or so is a good idea, your site should not be allowed to sit stagnant in the intervening time. If you say you want to always have the most effective website, then a commitment must be made at the highest levels of management, and resources and people must be allocated to provide a perpetual review and improvement program.

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The biggest single failure with websites is lack of planning.

Planning takes time, is not glamorous or fun, and strains your brain. But it absolutely **has** to be done! Fully a third of all the time

spent on a website project should be spent on planning. Defining business purposes and goals, identifying and classifying audiences and constituencies, determining marketing considerations, messages, calls-to-action, etc, should happen before *any* thought is given to things like visual design, page layout, and copywriting.

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Always try to look at your site through the eyes of someone who's never seen it before.

Unfortunately, this is a literal impossibility, because you've seen your site so many times that you're jaded and biased, but you have to try anyway. Constantly ask questions like, "If I'd never read this before, would it make sense to me?" or "If I'd never used this navigation before, would I be able to find what I'm looking for?" or "If I had questions about x, would I be able to find the answers here quickly and easily?"

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Use as few "things" as possible.

The elements of a page; words, pictures, images, columns, boxes, colors, borders, headings, lines, drop-downs, callouts, icons, gradients – use as few of them as possible. If you can achieve the same result with less, then do it.

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Designing a website is a combination of art and science.

Programmers generally handle the "science" and graphic designers handle the "art", but putting the two together to create a good website is an "art" unto itself, and those who are not trained in this art rarely do a good job of it. Hire professionals, for the art, for the science, and for the merging of the two. Web design should rightfully be described as a "craft" that combines art and science.

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Run away from developers who don't speak your language.

I'm not talking about English or Russian or Hindi – I'm talking about developers who only speak Geek, who never-endingly talk about HTML, CSS, and JavaScript. *You don't need to understand these technologies.* You shouldn't need to worry about them. It's the developer's job to understand and worry about them. If the developer you're talking with can't speak Branding, Business and Marketing, find one who can.

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Make sure the text in your site is written by a writer and edited by an editor.

Maybe that writer is you. Maybe not. Either way, good writing, proper grammar and punctuation, and correct spelling are extremely important. "Writing for the web" has become a separate subject, and a number of books have been written about it, because many of the rules of writing for the printed page do not apply to writing content for a website. The number one difference is that people don't like to read lots of words on computer screens, therefore the essence of *writing for the web* is brevity. If you are personally charged with writing content for your website, and you know you're not a good writer, then hire someone who is. Remember that there are people who are professionally trained as copywriters – if you're serious about your site, hire one of them. Don't get cheap here; remember that graphic artists, web designers and programmers are seldom good writers.

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Horizontal menus should not be placed at the extreme top of the page.

They should be *below* the masthead area, not above it. The menu is subordinate to the masthead. The masthead answers the first and most important question, "What is this place?" Then the menu

logically follows that and provides a way to navigate through "this place". It would not be logical to first provide a menu, *then* identify the site. Placing navigation below the masthead also locates it closer to the content area of the page, meaning the user's eyes (and mouse pointer) must travel a shorter distance to find the menu.

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The rule about opening new browser windows:

If a link in your site goes to another page in your site, it should NOT open the new page in a new browser window (or tab). If it's linking to a different (external) website, then it *should* open the new site in a new browser window (or tab), which serves to keep your site still available to the user.

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You do NOT need a completely custom website. (In fact, that would be a very bad idea)

By *completely custom*, I mean one that is hand-coded from scratch. This is an absurd waste of money. Using a high-quality predesigned template will save you tons of money and produce a really great-looking site. If you find a developer that tells you, "Oh, we don't use templates", find a different developer. Unless you have tens of thousands of dollars to spend, a built-from-scratch site is just nuts.



This has been a sampling of the 179+ snippets of wisdom in this book.

You can get all of them on Amazon [right here, right now.](#)