

Designing Your Site with Traffic in Mind

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Every experienced designer knows that visitor traffic is one of the key goals of most web sites. True, some sites are designed for the sheer pleasure of it, but the majority are built to hopefully draw crowds of visitors. Several interlocking components of design contribute to high traffic volume. Intuitive navigation, visual appeal, worthwhile content and excellent writing are all characteristics of high volume sites. It's important to keep these in mind as you plan and create your site.

There are specific steps you can take to design a site with the visitor in mind:

Download Time

Visitors explore the web using a variety of access speeds. You need to keep this in mind and accommodate even the slowest of modems. Keep your download time to within seconds. If it takes a full minute to download one page, you are going to lose at least half of your potential visitors. Compress everything, use graphics judiciously, and test your site as you design. Set your modem to 28.8K or even 14.4K and clock how long each page takes to load. If it's longer than 30 seconds, parse your site's byte size even more.

Screen Resolution

Most designers own large monitors - it goes with the territory. My own screen is set at 1024 x 768 pixels. However, the majority of your viewers set their screen at 800 x 600 pixels - about 68%! This obviously impacts on how your site should be designed. To make your site as user friendly as possible draft up your design to fit in a 800 x 600 screen. Accomplish this by either a) creating a static design to consistently load at 800 x 600 or b) use expanding tables (set at percentages instead of concrete pixel dimension - eg TD=80% rather than TD=800) to accommodate various screen sizes. At all costs, avoid horizontal scrolling. This automatically happens when a viewer looks at a site designed for a larger screen through an 800 x 600 or even worse, a 640 x 480 resolution setting.

Offer an Unique E-zine

A great way to get the word out about your site and attract repeat visitors is to offer a genuinely useful e-zine. Obviously, the e-zine has to offer more than an ad or promo about your site. You have to deliver content that is timely and valuable. Design your site with that in mind. What do you know that can enrich your viewers' lives? Share it with them on a regular monthly basis. Of course, do include a brief promo about your site - let them know that you offer even more useful content there. It is also useful to purchase ad space in high traffic ezines. Far more effective than banner exchange advertising!

Testimonials Tell the Story

Smart designers know how to gather concrete support. Make it easy for your satisfied visitors and customers to share their feedback. Over time, you can collect a wonderful collection of pertinent and useful PR input. Many people make the mistake of restricting feedback to guestbook entries. These do help, but to really draw their feedback to your visitor's attention, find other concrete ways to gather and display valid testimonials. Provide a feedback form area; ask for feedback to your e-zines and press releases; follow each sale with a feedback form. Make sure you ask for permission to quote them. Then post the glowing words on a special testimonials page on your site. You can also include a couple of rave reviews in every issue of your e-zine.

Give Them Value for Their Money

Everyone loves a bargain, especially if it offers quality and a guarantee! Always make it clear that your products and services are 100% guaranteed. Make sure you back up your claim, of course! Smart online merchants also offer a bonus to their customers - give them a perk! Let them know that they are getting your merchandise or services at rock bottom prices. Don't cheat yourself - but do offer quality goods for a fair price. You might compare your prices with your competition - and let your visitors know about it!

Target the Search Engines

Getting listed on the various search engines like Google, Yahoo, Altavista and Open Directory is important if people are going to find your site by using appropriate keywords. There is a move towards paid listings on most of the top search engines now. You may want to consider this. As well, ensure that your product or service is somehow included in your title code. Don't start your title with your company name. Rather, begin with the keywords of your product or service, e.g. "web design". List relevant keywords in your metatags, your image alt tags, and in your page link codes.

Keep It Current

It's a good idea to include a "Last Updated:" entry somewhere on each page of your website. People notice! They will trust information with a current date more than one updated in say, 1996. Information changes so quickly these days! You need to ensure that your information, prices, descriptions and so on are as current as possible. Make sure you change your Updated tag to reflect the most current revisions.

Analyze Your Traffic

If you are serious about your site, get a domain and house your site on a reliable webhost server. You will gain valuable statistics about your traffic in the package. Analyze your log file consistently - check the page views, the high traffic pages, the referer logs and especially - where your visitors exit from. Are they leaving because they've checked out everything? Or is there a page that creates loss of interest? Or stymies their attempts to move on? Make the navigation flawless so every page is easily accessible.

Everything you do to make the best site possible will help you generate traffic. Constantly analyze your site. As you recognize the need for improvement, fix what you see. It's a continuous game - quality assurance, if you will. Even the top-notch design experts revise their work on an ongoing basis. If you keep your site on the cutting edge of quality, value and sheer visual enjoyment, your traffic is assured - eventually, in droves!

Links

Speed Up Your Traffic for Fast Money <http://www.promotionbase.com/article/440>

Metatags: Increase Web Traffic <http://www.worldwideadnetwork.com/meta.htm>

Search Engine Secrets http://members.aol.com/Cre8web/rank_higher.html

Monitor & Analyze Website Traffic <http://www.workz.com/content/1182.asp>

Traffic Generation <http://www.trafficgeneration.com/>

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