



# Entrepreneur Incubator

## Reference Article

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### *Visible Difference*

*Make a good impression with your site and keep customers coming back*

Your business's website will be the first impression many people have of your company, products and services. As a result, your site represents a critical component of your branding strategy: it communicates who you are, what you offer and what you promise (your brand) through its content, organization and appearance (the look and feel). Just as you wouldn't deliver a sales pitch in your most casual attire, you don't want a disheveled site. So, whether you plan to develop your website yourself or outsource the task, consider it from a branding perspective.

#### **Step 1: Analyse**

Before you decide what to say and how to say it online, it's vital to analyse your audience, your competitors, your industry and yourself.

##### 1) **Audience Analysis**

Online success begins with a detailed audience profile. Who will your visitors be? What type of experience do they expect? How Internet-savvy are they? Do they want or need to be educated about your products? What type of appeal do they best respond to: emotional, intellectual or a combination?

##### 2) **Competitive Analysis**

You want to beat your competition without imitating them. So find out what your competitors' URLs are, and choose one that won't be confused with theirs. What do your competitors' sites look like? Since colour plays such a large role in memory filing and retrieval, avoid the same predominant colour used by your biggest competitor. On a broader plane, think about what makes you better than the others. What should customers buy from you?

##### 3) **Industry Analysis**

What are the predominant trends in your industry today? Carefully examine your industry's history, current state and future. Today's markets and technologies evolve rapidly, especially online. Be prepared.

##### 4) **Self-Analysis**

What's your corporate personality? Are you formal, fun or technical? How can you translate your brand visually and verbally on your website? Design and copywriting work hand-in-hand to communicate your brand.

#### **Step 2: Clarify**

Based on the above analyses, narrow your focus to a specific niche – don't try to be all things to all people. Target a specific audience with a specific offer for a specific product or service that features specific benefits. For example, instead of selling ladies shoes online, you could sell smart shoes to upscale bridesmaids looking for comfort and sophistication.

The more unlike the competition you are, the less competition you'll have. But how does this relate to branding online? The less competition you have, the



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harder it will be for consumers to replace your product – which makes price less important. And the less important price becomes, the easier it will be for you to communicate the value of your brand and the faster you'll build brand equity. Notice that in our "smart shoes" example above, price is virtually a non-issue. (It's important to note, however, that price is often a stumbling block for online sales since it's easy to price-check on the Internet).

### **Step 3: Strategise**

When it comes to your site, there are several areas that need your attention. The first two are site content and organization. Divide your site into sections according to user needs and expectations, then fill each section with the appropriate content.

#### **1) Map out a site diagram**

Even if you're outsourcing site development, you need to do this to the best of your ability. Use your home page for the most important information, like your selling proposition, and rely on links off the home page to provide more details. Include a map or directions link if you want to direct people to your physical location. Remember to plan for growth.

#### **2) Develop a site navigation system**

This will help visitors quickly and easily find the content they're looking for, such as a left-side menu, tabs at the top and search function. Remember, in the minds of consumers, a well organized site equals a well organized company. A smart message equals a smart company. And strategic site content and organization equal a strategic brand.

#### **3) Don't neglect the aesthetic appeal.**

The third area you need to focus on is your site's appearance. Consumers today are more visual than ever, so the appearance of your site is pivotal to your success. Your goal should be to develop a quality look and feel that reflects your company and your brand. Aim for the right emotional response overall, then use this – along with your logo and the design of your other sales tools – to guide your specific and layout. Professional-looking sites are clean and understated, with an airy feel. Avoid a busy or heavy look, like a black background. Finally, a quickloading site is key. Never sacrifice load time for special effects.

*By John Williams, Entrepreneur's "Image & Branding" columnist and head of LogoYes.com. During his 25 years in advertising, he's created brand standards for Fortune 100 companies like Mitsubishi and won awards for his design work. Taken from Entrepreneur Magazine, July 2008*