

TEN Thoughts on Creating Your Unique Web Site



By Trish Brock

When it comes to web sites, furniture dealers know how necessary they are. Because they are complicated and technical, they're often left to the experts to build. As a result, many sites are fairly functional but routine looking, lifeless and not inspiring. Your web site should broadcast your company's brand, culture and uniqueness and reflect your dealer's personality, not your web programmer's.

Here are some pointers that should help guide you when working with your web programmer, and to apply when you build or update your site.

1 Make sure your site looks like your dealership, and not a cookie-cutter repeat of a multitude of other dealers. Often web sites are developed by people different from those who developed sales materials, and as a result, dealers end up looking like two different companies. Be sure your corporate graphics, logo, photos and messaging and overall aesthetics are consistent throughout all of your communications vehicles. Don't miss the opportunity to reinforce your brand.

2 Keep text minimal. Whatever you say on a printed page, it needs to be two-thirds less on the web. Minimize scrolling and don't make your audience work hard to get your message. Attention spans are short and people won't read it. It has been noted that if a user can't find what they are looking for in seven seconds, they leave the site and rarely come back.

3 Keep text readable. Type should be large enough to read easily. Don't use images (ghosting) in the background with type on top; it's very hard on the eyes. Make sure there is enough contrast between the background and the type.

4 Make your site usable and easy to navigate. Be sure the navigation bar is in the same, easily recognizable place on each page, so users always know where they are and can get where they want to go.

5 Keep it active and current, and update information regularly. Your web site is organic and your opportunity to interact with your users. Give them a reason to come back frequently. If your site is old and boring, they may assume you are too.

6 Give value and experience. Make it informative of your industry as well as your company. Post new trends in the industry, any awards, submitted articles, awarded projects, press releases, newsletters, new product introductions, local related events, etc. Make your site the resource you want your dealership to be.

7 Be accessible. Make it easy to find contact information so you can be reached via e-mail or phone. Since it is well known that furniture sales are largely influenced by personal relationships, use this opportunity to give information on teams and key staff members. People want to know who they may do business with.

8 Have a professional design search engine optimization into your site. Everyone wants to be first on the page when googled. Have a professional help you optimize your site to increase your chances of landing there. But beware; there are a lot of criteria associated with search engine optimization and it's important to be realistic about your expectations. Key words, links to other sites, paying to be indexed, advertising and the like are only the tip of the iceberg.

9 Be clear about the objectives of your site. Have a strategy in mind. Aside from communicating information about your products and capabilities and establishing credibility, what do you want your site to accomplish? Does it also support your marketing plan and branding efforts? Too many dealers use their web sites as dumping grounds for philosophical discussions, lengthy mission statement etc., and make their sites bulky and distracting.

10 Make it dynamic! Because furniture dealers are communicating with a well defined business audience (vs. the general population), you have a greater opportunity to create a visually interesting site. People are accustomed to using web sites now, so be different and have fun! It's your chance to make a big, differentiating impression.

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