

50 Web Design Secrets

#1 - "Every Page on Your Site is an Ad"

View every single page on every web site as an advertisement.

That means it should have a point, some purpose or goal. The goal will be one of only a few things:

- To generate action by the visitor
- To help the visitor find something that they need or that interests them
- To capture information
- Or to communicate specific information

If someone visits any page and leaves or quits without fulfilling one of these goals, the page has failed.

Each page is an advertisement, either for the information on the page, a function, info capture, or for information on another page. It has no other major purpose.

When your page works, people will complete one of the goals. They will continue to engage with the web site. When it fails, they'll stop there and leave without getting what they want or giving what the page needs.

Any time you sit down to make a web page, ask, "What is the goal of this page? What is this page an advertisement for?"

And make it your sole goal to deliver that perfectly.

Secret #2 - "Your web design doesn't have to look good!"

It's not a popular idea, I know. Many web designers will stop listening at this point, but it's a fact.

A beautiful web page isn't necessarily a better one.

Comparative tests have shown that sometimes downright ugly, cheap-looking design can outperform slick, professional design.

Why?

The job of a web page is to facilitate communication, to share information between the page and its visitors.

Attractive design can get in the way of the communication. The design of your page will either support the message you want to share by drawing attention to the message, or it will detract - by drawing attention to itself.

(An underwear model may be very attractive, but that doesn't mean you want them in charge of a school crossing. That would be counter-productive.)

In addition to communicating the hard information through content, your web design also needs to give the right impression. This is the softer communication - the feel of the page, and the impression of the brand.

Depending on the brand and the personality you want to project, the design of your web sites may vary greatly.

For example, if you want to portray "exclusive craftsmanship", you'll want a web design that embodies those values.

But if the site is selling "cheap * discount * sale" - whether it's shoes, computers, flights or insurance - the web design should reflect those values. In this case, a cheap site that looks like it has not had thousands invested in it may sell MORE than a really classy one.

Remember, you don't want people to stop and look AT your web design (unless that actually is your goal, i.e. it's your portfolio). You want them to interact with the information on it.

Design web pages that make interaction easier, before you worry too much about visual appeal.

#3 - "Attention - the lifeblood of your web site"

Success of your web site can be understood in one word: **Attention**.

Is what it's all about. Attention is the lifeblood of your web site.

Traffic gives you the attention you start with. If your traffic is the right traffic, they'll want what you offer, and you'll have more initial attention.

The web designer's job is to preserve that attention, to nurture it, and to guide it to where it needs to go.

So each page must catch visitor's attention immediately, so they're convinced they're in the right place to get what they want.

Then the page must keep visitor engaged so that the full message can be shared. Finally, the goal must be to draw attention to a call to action:

- to buy
- download
- request a call
- fill in contact form
- do a search
- or select another page to view

... Anything that keeps visitor's attention on the site and keeps them moving forward.

The more stuff you have on your pages, the more you dissolve attention between all those visual elements. So the trick is to balance Simplicity with Appeal.

The more detail you put into your packaging, the less attention goes to your product. So STP tells designers to "design your content - not the box it comes in".

#4 - "Be Distinctive"

If you're going to go to the trouble and expense of marketing online, make the effort to stand out.

Do not go by what your competitors do. If you do, you'll just join the flock.

In the flock, it's hard to make out an individual. If a prospective customer comes online and looks at all the web sites available, and they all seem to stand in a huddle, looking the same, saying the same thing, how are they going to choose?

Let's say there are 1000 competitors in your market, and you share search engine rankings fairly (which is, of course, impossible). If you all look and sound the same, you only have a one in 1000 chance of attracting any visitor.

However, if you stand apart from the flock, you'll at least give them reason to say, "What's special about these guys?"

I'm not saying you should be different for the sake of being different! You are already different. Stop trying to act the same!

What is it about you or your organisation that's unique? What are you passionate about? Where do you go the extra mile? What do your customers LOVE about you? What can you say about you that no-one else can say?

When you answer these questions, find that essence, that unique proposition, which will make you truly distinctive online. Make that essence seep from every pore on your site - in your design, in your navigation, in your language - and you will get more business.

Imagine your prospect has looked at a few sites and then says, "Let's go back to those guys who ..."

What's your dot-dot-dot?

#5 - "Say it!"

One of the most common mistakes on web pages is simply not saying it!

What is this page for? What can you do here? Why am I looking at this? Whatever it is, just say it!

When you click on a link for "Contact us", you expect a contact page.

When you click on a link to "Buy now", you expect to buy from the next page.

When you click on a link that promises to explain something, you expect to know immediately that you'll get the explanation on the page.

Web pages that attempt to play with their visitors' attention by being clever, coy, or cryptic FAIL. You cannot beat good honest up-front transparency.

Try this test on your own web pages. Without scrolling, can you immediately see the point of the page? Is it shining out? Is there one thing that first draws your eye, which explains in simple language what the page is that you're on?

If these things don't happen, you will not be able to help your visitors answer the only important question there is in web design...

... *"Am I in the right place?"*

Everything hinges on this simple question.

#6 - "Know the Sheer Power of Links"

Do you know how Google figures out which web pages to put at the top of the search results?

Well, it's all about relevance. Google wants to find the best way to estimate which of the squillions of pages in its index is the most relevant to a particular term.

It's based on two factors:

- How relevant the page says it is
- How relevant the rest of the world says the page is

Now, the first factor is important. You should optimise your pages around your chosen keywords (more about choosing keywords another time). But on-page optimisation is only about 10% of the story.

The big, really important factor is what the rest of the world says the page is about. And that comes down to one thing - inbound links.

Basically, these are the two factors that dictate how high you will rank for your keywords. You want as many links as you can get from pages that are...

- related (with similar subject matter, very important)
- and have high PageRank (very important - PageRank is an indicator of how respectable the linking page is)

That's it. That is what distinguishes the top-ranking pages from the also-rans (and the top-ranking pages get the lion's share of the visitors, and sites that get more visitors get more business).

So increasing your search engine ranking is one of the most cost-effective ways to get more business via your web site. And the way to do that is to get more relevant inbound links.

Here's the problem.

Creating your own links is a very laborious, time-consuming business. And if you go chasing links from irrelevant, low-PageRank pages, you are totally wasting your time.

There are tools coming out onto the market that help you find pages that are relevant and well-respected.

The newest one comes from the guys at WordTracker, who have been building tools to help professionals and amateurs do better SEO for years. It's called "Link Builder", and it's easy to use (like their main keyword research tool) and very effective.

They are also currently discounting the tool, so if you would like to take a shortcut to boosting your search engine rankings, here's what to do...

Go to <http://bit.ly/fC6Pq3>, and click "Take a FREE Trial" for LinkBuilder.

#7 - "Manage the eye (Nine Noticeability Factors)"

When someone comes to your web site, they should quickly be able to scan the page and know "Yup - I'm in the right place".

Some web pages are so busy that the eye simply can't settle on the content. It skips around from one element to another, and no information gets through. Then "ping!" the clock runs out and you've lost the visitor's attention.

Look at your own web pages. Are they easy to look at - AND yet visually appealing?

Some web pages just have too much shouting for your attention, so your attention is fractured.

Others don't try to draw your attention anywhere, and your attention is squandered - which is just as bad!

In order to fix either issue, you need to know the factors that draw attention, and - then - how to balance those factors.

Here are the 9 "Noticeability Factors" that I describe in Save the Pixel:

1. Size
2. Colour
3. Contrast
4. Boldness
5. Space
6. Position
7. Dynamism
8. 3D effects
9. Content

You can use any (and all) of these factors to draw visitor's attention to one thing or another.

If you try to draw attention to too many things, you will fail to keep that attention, and that's bad news.

So let every page have a focal point, a simple "Start here" for every visitor. Tip: The focal point should be the most instantly noticeable thing on the page, and it should be in the content. There's no point drawing attention to the non-content features that are the same on all pages (like branding & navigation).

#8 - "Keep it Simple"

I'm going to keep this one really simple.

Only use as much of anything as you have to. The more stuff you have, the more you splinter your visitor's attention.

All busyness draws the eye. Where do you want the eye drawn to? Where don't you want it drawn to? Which way is the way forward?

Look at any important page on your site, and ask:

- Do you have boxes you don't need?
- Do you have words you don't need?
- Do you have navigation options you don't need?
- Do you have lines you don't need?
- Do you have colours you don't need?
- Do you have images you don't need?
- Do you have gradients you don't need?
- Do you have options you don't need?
- Do you have controls you don't need?
- Do you have pages you don't need?
- Do you have different typefaces you don't need?
- Do you have backgrounds you don't need?

If you find anything you don't need, get rid of it. Just strip it out. I bet no one even notices.

Strip out enough distraction, and people will have to look at what really matters (your content). When that happens, engagement will go up, pages per visit will go up, bounce rate will go down, and you'll be doing better business. We've proved it time and again.

I love this quote by Saint-Exupéry:

"It seems perfection is finally attained not when there is no longer anything to add, but when there is no longer anything to take away..."

#9 - "What's In It For Me?"

Everyone visits a web page for a reason. I don't know what the reason is, it's slightly different every time.

I do know that there's a driving force behind any goal that any visitor wants to reach. The driving force behind what we do - anything we do - is called self-interest.

When you're creating a web page, imagine someone visiting the page, consider what they may be looking for, and then ask "What's In It For Me?"

Where's the value on the page? How can a first-time visitor spot that value immediately?

Here's a tip. Whenever you find yourself talking about the properties, values, or features of something, connect it to "YOU the reader".

Change, "This does that" or "This has this property", to "You can do THIS because this does that", or "Because of this property of that, you'll never have to worry about the other".

Whatever you do, whatever you say, whatever you show, let me know instantly what's in it for me, and I'll engage.

Hide the value, and lose the visitor. It's as simple as that.

#10 - "Build Your List"

Whatever you're doing online, whether you're blogging, marketing your own business, or selling stuff, you **MUST** build an email list.

However many people come through your web site, whether it's a handful or several thousand a day, knowing who they are turns them from a stranger to a prospect. Every time you get a new name on your list, that's money for you, one way or another.

A mailing list is not just for sending out news about your stuff. It's a Swiss Army knife for all your marketing. You can use your mailing list to:

- Send out a personal message when you add new content to your site (as long as it's interesting and valuable).
- Get marketing insight by sending your customers and prospects surveys to find out their views.
- Promote your own products. Conversion rates can be really great. We got 411 upgrades to Save the Pixel 2 by emailing a list of under 3000 previous buyers.
- Promote other people's products (affiliate marketing).

My tips for running a good mailing list

1. **START NOW!!**
2. Offer visitors something valuable for free (which doesn't cost you anything). I use these 50 Web Design Secrets.

3. Use autoresponders extensively. These will go out after fixed delays after a new person subscribes.
4. Be polite and respect people's privacy. Don't ever sell your list, but you may use it with care to promote selected services that you believe in and use yourself.
5. Only use a specialist provider. If you send emails out from your own domain, you risk getting blacklisted, which is very bad news. The best providers enforce industry best practice and are trusted by all the major ISPs.
6. Play fair, within the rules of the game, and play hard. Use your mailing list as often as you can.
7. Give away useful information, and invite people to send your mail-outs to anyone they think may be interested. If you don't ask, you don't get.

#11 - "Have a Next Step"

Have you ever used a web page, scanned the content approvingly, scrolling down to the bottom, and then thought, "Now what?"

So many web pages do this, and it's grade-A first-class free range stupid.

You get to the bottom of the content, and then you're expected to scroll A-L-L the way back up to the top of the page to consult the conveniently placed global navigation in order to decide where to go next.

Finishing a web page with a dead-end is like having a sales conversation and stopping halfway through until they say the magic word. You'd never do it in real life. Why do it on your web site?

I guess there's a bit in our brains that says, "Navigation goes at the top". Well, yes, it does, but where is it written that you only get one navigation?

Think through every page on your site, and try these two simple questions:

1. What is someone who comes to this page looking for?
2. After we've told them what we tell them, what will they want next?

Then put links to those next likely things at the bottom of the content. Not in the side column, not in the footer, and certainly not waaaaay back up at the top of the page!

If you want someone to go somewhere, you'll be amazed how many more actually go there when you make it easy for them. We've tested it, it's true. More people click a link when you give them a link to click than when you don't. Fact!

#12 - "Do One Thing Well"

You'll know by now that I'm a huge ambassador for simplicity.

The less you do, the more clearly you do it. The less you show, the more attention each thing gets.

I am waking up the principle of multiplicity. This means, don't lump a lot of different things together. Have multiple, distinct, simple things.

This applies very much to software design. A few years ago, I worked on a site called Gurushot, which had a simple objective - to be a search engine for wisdom.



You could type any keyword into Gurushot, and it would try to match that word to the wisdom quotes on its database, and show you a quotation that it thinks will be inspiring and helpful. You could then say "Yes, it was inspiring" or not.. and Gurushot would learn for the future.

Sure, there's quite a bit of clever code behind the scenes, but we were absolutely sure that we wanted Gurushot to feel really simple and easy. And that meant doing less.

It's easier to communicate one simple thing than it is to present a lot of options. If we showed lots of different functions, maybe people wouldn't have discovered the one core thing that could really help them.

Many web sites are like being in a crowded bar. There are so many conversations going on, you can't really understand anything.

Whether you're marketing your business, selling products, or creating a Web2.0 application, just do one thing at a time and do it really well.

#13 - "Don't be a Swiss Army Knife"

Following on from the last secret (do one thing well), you should also consider your web offering from the search engines' perspective. They love pages that are specifically about something.

A web page that is about a lot of things isn't about anything in particular. It's like a Swiss Army knife.

A Swiss Army knife is a really useful tool, because it has a lot of different bits. But all of those bits are rubbish compared to a dedicated tool.

A Swiss Army knife has a poor knife, a poor saw, a poor pair of scissors, etc. etc.

If you need to saw something, you won't think, "Oh, where's that Swiss Army knife". You'll only find it useful on rare occasions, when you don't have access to a better, dedicated tool.



The same thing applies when Google looks at your web site.

Look at this way.

- If you search on Google for "saw", you don't get a Swiss Army knife.
- If you search on Google for "pliers", you don't get a Swiss Army knife.
- If you search on Google for "file", you don't get a Swiss Army knife.
- If you search on Google for "bottle opener", you don't get a Swiss Army knife.
- etc...

So if your home page tries to tell everything you offer - and you don't have specific pages dedicated to each of those things - you've got a Swiss Army knife.

That means your web site is weakly about each service and each product that you offer. So it won't rank well for any of them.

And because we're talking about the web, everything is on view, so you can bet there's a whole bunch of dedicated tool pages out there ready to take the traffic.

There are no prizes for being bad at a bunch of things. Do each thing well.

#14 - "Distinguish Yourself"

If someone comes to your home page, can they say with confidence, "This is a ##### site" ??

Continuing the theme of the importance of making a clear, clean impression, what does your home page say about you? What does every page on your web site say about you?

We get so many messages every day that we are becoming skilled at instantly forgetting anything that isn't immediately interesting and relevant. Any message that doesn't have authenticity and value to me will be ignored. We have to do that to keep sane.

In that kind of environment, to be remembered - even to be noticed - you have to say something. Take a position.

Say what you ARE.

Also say what you AREN'T, if it's relevant.

Give me a reason to care. If you don't give any reasons, don't complain when nobody cares.

Afraid of putting some visitors off? I get that. But don't be.

You see, when you take a position, when you distinguish yourself as "this, not that" you'll start to be something.

And when you be something, that something can be identified as not what some people want, and it can be recognised as exactly what other people want.

So for every prospect you lose by taking a position, you'll earn the trust of another. The only sure way to fail is to be nothing, or to try to be everything, and end up saying nothing to nobody.

#15 - "Say One Thing"

Pick a page on your web site. What thing does it say? What is the message of the page? If you had to write it down, how many words would it be?

Every page on your site should be about one thing.

Just one.

Being distinctive means being sharp, having an edge, having a point. So give every single page a single point.

Here's why it's vital.

Reason One

When someone arrives at a page on your web site, whether they've followed an internal link, come from another site, or from a search engine, they only have one question, "Am I in the right place?"

You only have a limited amount of attention-time to answer that question - preferably with a "Yes!"

The quickest way to answer that golden question is just to say it. Let your page shout out its purpose, what content you'll find, and what you can do there.

Reason Two

Search engines love pages that are about something. Pages that are about lots of things are Swiss Army knives. It's not a saw, it's not a can opener, it's not a knife - it's all of these things, but none of them in particular.

So when you focus your page on a topic and say it with boldness, it makes it much easier for search engines to match your page to people's queries. They'll reward you for it.

You may think, "Won't I need more pages?" Yes, you will. Lots more more effective pages!

You may also be thinking, "What about my page that lists all the different widgets we do?" Well, that page should be about "All The Widgets We Do". It should say what's great about all your widgets, and then it can go on to show pictures and descriptions of all your widgets. But the focus of the page is one thing: "Our Widgets". You can still have a lot of content, as long as the message at the top of the page neatly encompasses and describes all that content.

There are only a few things you can say about visitors to your web site with complete confidence. One is that their tastes and preferences are NOT the same as yours. The other is that they are human beings. Which brings me onto Secret 16...

#16 - "Be Human"

People are interested in people. Dogs like to sniff other dogs, because it's in their genes. People respond to people. We can't help it. We are people, and we're motivated by competition and the urge for safety and companionship, and the urge to breed. That's what being human means.

Human Language

Your visitors are human, so are you. So speak as what you are - human. Everyone seeks connection, something they can trust, particularly online (where trust is naturally low). If you put your humanity into your web site, you will connect with more people.

Speak as yourself, as though you were talking to a friend. Do YOU like reading jargon? Do you connect to it? No, me either. So don't use it.

Human Images

If you sell services (which are almost all delivered by people), show them in context. Show people.

Pictures of people convey a lot of information. Images tend to give softer information (more feel than fact), but we can read a LOT into a face. So pictures of people can be very good value content-wise.

Eye tracking studies regularly show that our focus is drawn to faces. We can't help it.

Pictures of people should (usually) smile & make eye contact. We connect to smiles, and we connect to eyes. The size of the smile depends on the context.

- Someone working in a store should have a bright, attractive, open smile.
- Funeral directors should wear slight, sympathetic smiles.
- People looking after nuclear reactors should be focusing on their job - not on the camera!

One of the all-time masters of selling through talking to people naturally is legendary copywriter Drayton Bird. His book "Commonsense Direct & Digital Marketing" is hands-down the best guide you can have to the art of marketing to humans. Highly recommended.

#17 - "Break Out Your Testimonials and FAQs"

Testimonials and FAQ (or Q&A) content are extremely important tools for getting people to trust your offering. They work in slightly different ways.

Testimonials offer third-party validation. When someone's on your site, they want what you offer to be right, but they need to be convinced.

Seeing a quote from someone who's like them (another customer), which is credible and seems honest, is a great way to raise the prospect's trust.

FAQs are also useful for raising trust. They do it by filling in the gaps - the little questions that could make the difference between choosing to proceed or not to proceed.

Even if the questions you see answered on a web site are not the ones in your mind, they can generate trust in the brand. When you see other customers' concerns being treated with respect and thoroughness, you can assume you can worry less about your own concerns.

Now... many web sites have a page for FAQs, and a page for Testimonials.

This is the **WRONG WAY TO DO IT**.

Can you remember the last time you clicked on a FAQs or Testimonials link?

Here's the rub. Nobody wants to read FAQs, or quotes from other people. You don't go online in your lunch hour and think, "You know, I'll spend some time reading testimonials." There's no benefit in it.

The times when a testimonial or Q&A may helpful is when you're doing something that's relevant to that message. When they're all grouped together, most of the content is going to be irrelevant to most people, most of the time.

So having a page dedicated to these powerful messages is really just a good way to file them away where nobody needs to see them.

Testimonials and FAQ pages are archives

What's the right way?

The right way to use this content is - at the point it's needed.

Use this content within your other content. Use it within your sales funnel, where it can positively help. Don't make someone have to leave the flow in order to find the information they need.

If you're talking about your delivery promises, show a testimonial that tells the visitor how happy your other customers are to receive their deliveries so promptly.

While you're there, counter a possible objection by showing a Q&A on "What happens if my package doesn't arrive?" with a positive answer. That way, you're giving your prospect every reason to trust you, and you're telling them at the exact moment they need to hear the message.

#18 - "Be Conventional (Where It Serves You)"

Conventions are great. They're essentially solutions that have been designed before, and which have worked so often that they're now part of the general tool kit.

Common web conventions include:

- Placement (logo in the top-left, login stuff in the top-right)
- Colours (text is black on white background, links are blue)
- Iconography (look at the toolbar above, you don't need to think to know what most of that stuff does)

There are literally thousands of conventions, which we don't realise are conventions. We don't think about them, which is exactly right. That's why conventions work!

Conventions work because:

1. You can use them in your web design without too much thought or work.
2. The people who visit your web site can understand what's going on without too much thought or work.

Some "creatives" think that it's their job to create new stuff all the time (that's what "creative" means, right?) They think it's all about surprising web site visitors, wrong-footing them, making them think.

This is quite a short-sighted approach. Actually, most new things fail. That's just a law of Nature. There are common design patters for most things, which already work well.

It's hard to create something that works as well as a recognised convention - even a bad convention (and there are plenty of those around, but they still work because they're familiar).

So when do you follow the convention, and when do you try something new?

I believe you should use a convention wherever it completely suits your needs. That saves you time and creative effort, which you can then apply to the problems that really matter.

Where there is no conventional solution, or there is no convention that does what you know your design must do, then use all that stored up creativity and come up with something that works - beautifully!

#19 - "Every Web Site Is Selling Something"

Every web site is selling something. It may be a product, a service, an idea, a subscription, or it may be advertising something.

All these goals require visitors to take some kind of action. To pay money, to hand over personal details, to read a full article, to download a PDF, or just to stay online and be exposed to stuff.

The only way you can sell anything to anyone is to convince them that what they're getting from the site is worth more to them than what they're investing.

They may be investing money, time, personal details, and attention.

If you abuse the attention you get, and expect them to hand over more than they're willing to hand over, they won't do it.

You have to build attention, build desire, and build trust, so that the actions you require people to take make sense to them at the point they're required to take them.

That's what web design is all about. You're trading value for value. The only thing you need to do to succeed is: to make the trade worth it.

#20 - "Stop Being Clever!"

Cleverness is a handicap in many areas of life, and certainly in design.

Nearly all the answers you need in life are simple. The problem is, we tend to ask complicated questions.

Here are some simple secrets - 6 for the price of one today!

The Secret to Business - Find out what people want, and give it to them.

The Secret to Selling - Find out what people value, and show them that your solution is worth more to them than it costs.

The Secret to Customer Service - Listen, empathise, and tell the truth.

The Secret to Success - Find something you enjoy, that you do well, and which is valuable... and stick to it.

The Secret to Wealth - Spend less than you earn.

The Secret to Happiness - Spend your time doing what you love, with people you like.

This is a very important secret. It's mainly in the realm of copywriting, but also touches on imagery and many other areas.

#21 - "Speak to Your True Prospect"

Many different types of people will come to your web site.

Some have already decided they want what you're offering. We don't need to worry about them. Whatever you do, they'll proceed anyway.

Some are definitely not in the market for what you're offering. They want something else entirely. We can ignore them as well. Whatever you do, you're not going to convert them.

Others may want what you offer. Let's focus on these guys.

What do you actually know about the people who actually accept what you offer (customers etc.)?

What kind of people are they? Are they teachers, parents, housewives, professional lawyers, teenagers..?

What is their previous experience of your product/service, and others like it? Are they fresh, exploring options, or cynical?

What really motivates them? What are the specific problems that they need to solve?

The key to how to speak to your web site visitors lies in the answer to these questions. Let your web site's content resonate with a consistent tone of voice, brand, look and feel that's 100% focused on what you KNOW about your visitors.

That's why you hear advertisements start with, "If you or a loved one..." -- Just one example among millions... What that line is doing is saying, "If this is you, you need to hear the rest of the message." it's as simple as that.

When you can create a page that seems to speak directly to me, the visitor, you'll get my attention. That actually generates more attention, which gives you more opportunity to convey your message to me. I'll be more engaged, more switched on, and I'll feel more confident that I'm going to find what I came for on this site.

#22 - "Don't Ignore Old Media"

It's very tempting to think that the Web is the only way to get eyeballs, traffic, and conversations. Well, these things were not invented with the web browser. Marketers have been reaching, convincing, generating action, measuring and improving for over a hundred years without a Web. And... they've been making a profit.

There's a sobering realisation for me here. In the rush to adopt "New Media" we can overlook the lessons of the past.

All that's really new about the web is the speed at which it's possible to test stuff, count results, think again, try again, and - uh - repeat..

That's all marketing is really about. It involves two things: creativity and analysis.

Who's my market? What do they want? What's going to get their attention? What appeal will work for them? What info do they need to see to build trust?

These questions are not new. They're the same questions that made millions for people like John Caples and Eugene Schwartz.

And they're simple, aren't they? Perhaps we think our New Media world is too sophisticated for those simple ol' questions.

You know what the weird thing is? Somewhere we stopped teaching those questions. Well, I made it through over 10 years as a pro web designer before someone taught me. (Nod to Mr. Ken McCarthy.)

So what's the secret? There's nothing new under the sun. People are the same as they've always been. They need the same marketing they've always needed.

And it's so much easier and quicker to market now, we have no excuse not to make money!

Secret #23 - "When Saying NO is Powerful"

When can saying "no" to someone be the most effective tool?

In my experience, it's great in sales, and it's great for client management.

Personally, I feel that saying "yes" to the wrong project is the worst mistake I ever make; worse than turning down something that could have been good (because I wouldn't find out anyway).

Here's a story, which may or may not be true...

There was a lady who wanted to date a certain gentleman. But this man had a reputation. He'd been out with all the other ladies. His cell phone was full of numbers with names like "Do not answer 15" and "Do not answer 21".

This lady did not want to become "Do not answer 35" (or whatever number), so she did the opposite of what the other ladies had done. She said, "No" and "maybe" and "I'll think about it" and the gentleman got very interested and they lived happily ever after.

Saying "no" can be really effective, and - as the story shows - it's an opportunity to distinguish your offering from the other offerings out there.

Someone recently asked me to submit a home page design along with my proposal for a competitive pitch. I said no. I said that my rates are my rates, and if I started doing design for competitive pitches, I would have to put my rates up, and I didn't want to do that. (I didn't get the project. Sometimes, it pays to fold early.)

Clients have asked me "How many designs are you going to show us?" Clearly, a lot of designers out there do 3 different designs and make the client choose which they prefer. This is disempowering for the designer and shows the client how little they respect their own skills and judgement.

So when I hear that question, I reply "Hopefully one!" I try to get design right first time - and I like that my clients have that same expectation.

When a client asks for something we don't do, I just tell them we don't do it. I can then explain what we do specialise in, and how much work we put in to doing what we do really well, and how if we spread our skills out too thinly, we wouldn't be able to deliver the high standard of results they expect.

Whenever I say "no" to a prospect, or to a client, I do it with integrity and it seems to build trust, not diminish it.

Secret #24 - "Give Away Your Knowledge"

It's hard to build trust on the web. I believe that one of the best ways to earn people's trust is to be generous with your knowledge.

I don't mean to go over to their office and spend half a day giving them free consulting (that doesn't pay off, I've tried it). I'm talking about publishing what you know online.

This applies particularly if you're in a service industry, but it can also help if you sell products, just because it helps people feel safe with you.

The common objection is, *"If I tell people what I know, won't they just use that knowledge and not hire me?"*

If they are going to do that, do you think they would really have hired you in the first place?

When I write about how to create web pages, I'm giving information on several levels. Some of that information will be useful to someone who wants to create a web page. Those guys were never going to hire me.

But it's also telling people that I know how to create web pages that work. It tells them that I am so confident in my skills, that I can share it freely. And it gives them a clear signal that they can trust me. Once you have trust, much of the battle is won.

So, if you're a financial advisor, just blog about what you know. Tell people what to look for, and what to avoid. You are as likely to create a demand for your service as you are to make it so that someone doesn't need to hire you.

If you specialise in cleaning carpets, blog about ways to clean carpets. Tell people what they can clean easily themselves, and also tell them what they should **never** try to clean themselves (creating opportunities). You never know, they may be in a rush, and prefer to call in the trusted expert instead...

If you teach yoga, why not make some videos and show people a basic daily routine? Then, when they're ready to learn more, maybe they'll get in touch with you.

All this information is putting your brand in front of potential customers who may not even be ready for you yet, but may be soon, and may be crafted into customers through your generosity.

Secret #25 - "Consider Untouchable Keywords"

You may not thank me for this. I'm going to invite you to do something kind of yucky, unpleasant, distasteful.

When you're marketing your business, it's important to use the language that your potential customers would use, not the language you'd use.

That's easier said than done. Sometimes it can feel wrong to use the incorrect terminology, compared to the proper vocab that everyone in your industry understands. But if the people out there on the street don't use those words - don't use those words!

So if they're talking about "best way to save money", don't talk about "flexible investment packages" on your web site.

Keyword research is your key to finding out what people are actually looking for. You should definitely invest in a powerful research tool like Wordtracker or SEOMoz Pro to help you uncover the keywords that are really being searched for and have relatively low competition.)

But sometimes the keyword research will show up words that you just don't want to know about. Words that make you cringe, that make you want to put your fingers in your ears.

Words like "cheap".

Very few businesses would want to be identified with "cheap" but a LOT of people out there are looking for it.

I had a client who provides low-cost web hosting. When I did their keyword research, "cheap hosting provider" came out as a winning phrase. A lot of searches, and - guess what - not too much competition.

I just did a presentation for a bunch of people in the printing industry. When I did some sample keyword research for my seminar, using "leaflet printing" as my starting point, guess what came up again as a little seam of stinking gold? That's right, "Cheap leaflet printing"!

Do you have the guts to be open to any keyword, even if you can't personally say it without looking like Scrooge?

Here's a little secret. Your web pages don't have to identify you as cheap! Of course, you probably don't want to associate your brand with... that word. And you don't have to.

You can talk about cheap hosting/printing/etc and talk about the risks and pitfalls of going for really cheap options, how they can cost you more in the long run. Create a page that's covered in "cheap".

Then, you can position your own offering relative to "cheap" and say why your low-cost / affordable / value-for-money solution is so good and doesn't cost the earth.

Secret #26 - "Look Beyond Search Traffic"

It's easy to get sucked in to thinking that the Web is all there is.

Sure, web traffic can be cheap, but it's not the only game in town. People have been marketing profitably for a long time before the web.

The wise marketer uses the right tool for the right job. It's all marketing - matching propositions to markets.

Not everyone who needs what you offer is looking for it on Google

In fact, only a minority of your potential market for anything are actually looking for that thing.

A lot of them are not at that level of awareness. They know they have a problem, and they're looking for "solutions" to their problem, not "your solution."

They're asking, "What's the best way to..?" or "Does Competitor Product X really work?"

Or they're aware of a problem, need, or opportunity - but are not yet aware of any products or services that might resolve that need.

They might be asking, "How can I..?" or "Problems with..."

Now, with a bit of creative thinking, you can identify these markets, and even reach them with search marketing.

But there's another massive market, at an even deeper, more primitive level. These are the people that are not even aware of the need or opportunity.

What's significant about these guys is that they aren't looking for anything (because they don't have a problem). And if they aren't looking, you can't target them with SEO.

So what do you have to do?

You have to reach them where they already are!

We've gone over the line of SEO now. To reach these people, you need to advertise to them. You need to make them aware of the potential opportunity or problem, and then lead them to your proposed solution.

A few ways to do this include pay-per-click ads, good ol' banner ads, guerilla marketing on forums and blogs, and even old media. That's right, I'm talking about print advertising, radio advertising, and direct mail.

Ask where the majority of your market is. If your market isn't aware of the problems your solutions solve, then you need to reach out to them, where they are right now. And that's not Google.

There's gold in them hills! For the full story and how to use these insights to build your own business, it's all in my new book "Convert!" published January, 2011 and available on Amazon now.

Secret #27 - "The Best SEO is - No SEO at all"

If you're trying to target a specific search market, it always pays to do keyword research, to optimise your landing pages for your target keywords, and sometimes to build inbound links.

The problem is, link-building is, to use a technical term, a royal pain in the arse.

It's time-consuming and it feels kind of wrong, going onto people's blogs and forums and trying to trick them into not rejecting your half-hearted comments. Personally, I don't feel good about it.

It's much easier if you already own a bunch of domains or you're established on a range of forums (or you have a bunch of friends who are).

But the ideal way to generate links is not to have to do it at all, and the way to do that is by building a reputation instead.

It's not the short path, but it's the best path.

I started posting web design articles online in 2004. Now, when I add a new article, I don't need to do any promotion. I'll tweet about it, and add it to del.icio.us, digg, stumbleupon, and reddit. But the heavy lifting is done by my RSS feed.

Here's the secret... Write good content

If you consistently publish content that is:

- interesting
- newsworthy
- generous
- useful
- and timely

... you will build a following. Do it with integrity, with openness, and trust your readers, and they'll repay your trust by trusting you in return.

Make it easy for people to follow you through RSS, Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook, etc. and definitely set up an email list.

Even if you don't have an audience today, believe me, it's worth it.

All you have to do to be a leader is start being a leader. People don't recognise a leader until they see one doing what leaders do.

Then, when you want to reach a new market, you just write another great piece of content for that market, and tell a few people, who'll each tell a few other people, and so on. Easy.

But, like most incredibly useful things, there's a barrier to entry. You need commitment, and you need faith.

If I've earned your trust then trust me on this, have faith, and go for it ;-)

Secret #28 - "Please, tell me why I can trust you!"

Put yourself in this scenario...

You want to buy a bed. You visit 10 different bed shops and speak to the sales advisors there.

You ask them what bed they would recommend and why.

They tell you about the different types of materials used, the prices, the credit options, the flame retardant, the choice of sponginess or springiness.

But they don't tell you **why**. They don't tell you "From what you've told me, I think this is just the bed for you, because..."

Of course, that would never happen in the real world, because the bed shops would go out of business. But it's all over the web! Try a search for what you do, and look at the top 10 results from your competitors. How many home pages step forward, take you by the hand, and tell you what's so special about them, or who could really benefit from what they're offering?

As part of my Pro Web Design Course, I'm running a series of "Top 10 Google result review" screencasts for my students. What keeps striking me is how many web sites shrink into the shadows, muttering about what they do, instead of grabbing the visitor in a big warm hug and telling them, "Yes! You're in the right place! You've found what you're looking for! Let me show you why!"

Secret #29 - "Pop the damn question"

Content is king. The way you deliver your content is far less important than the content itself.

Poor delivery can prevent good content from reaching its audience, but great delivery cannot compensate for crappy content.

When you're designing web sites, or if you're commissioning a web designer to do it for you, please invest the majority of your time and your budget on crafting a great offer, powerful appeal, compelling propositions.

The graphic design of your web site needs to be good enough, and you should invest enough to ensure it works, and is appropriate for the task.

But if you don't invest in your message, whatever you spend on your sexy delivery will be wasted.

So many web sites are so focused on setting the right atmosphere and looking impressive that they seem to forget the whole purpose is to engage someone.

It's like spending a fortune on the perfect romantic setting, with candlelight, music, great food, and a diamond ring... but forgetting to ask the question.

If you want to engage someone, there's only one thing you absolutely must do. **ASK THE DAMN QUESTION!!!**

That means setting out your proposition, making it compelling, and then having a clear call to action that demands a yes or no decision.

If you do this, I promise you your web site will make more money. Ignore this advice at your peril.

Secret #30 - "Cut the Decoration"

If you were to strip all the:

- Content (whether imagery or text)
- Navigation
- Branding
- Functions

... out of your web page, how much would be left?

If your web page still looks nice; if it has an interesting, appealing visual style, you've got a problem.

All this stuff that isn't in one of the four categories above is called "decoration" and it harms the success rates of your web site.

Every pixel you put on your web pages can draw visitors' attention.

What really matters is - what you draw their attention to.

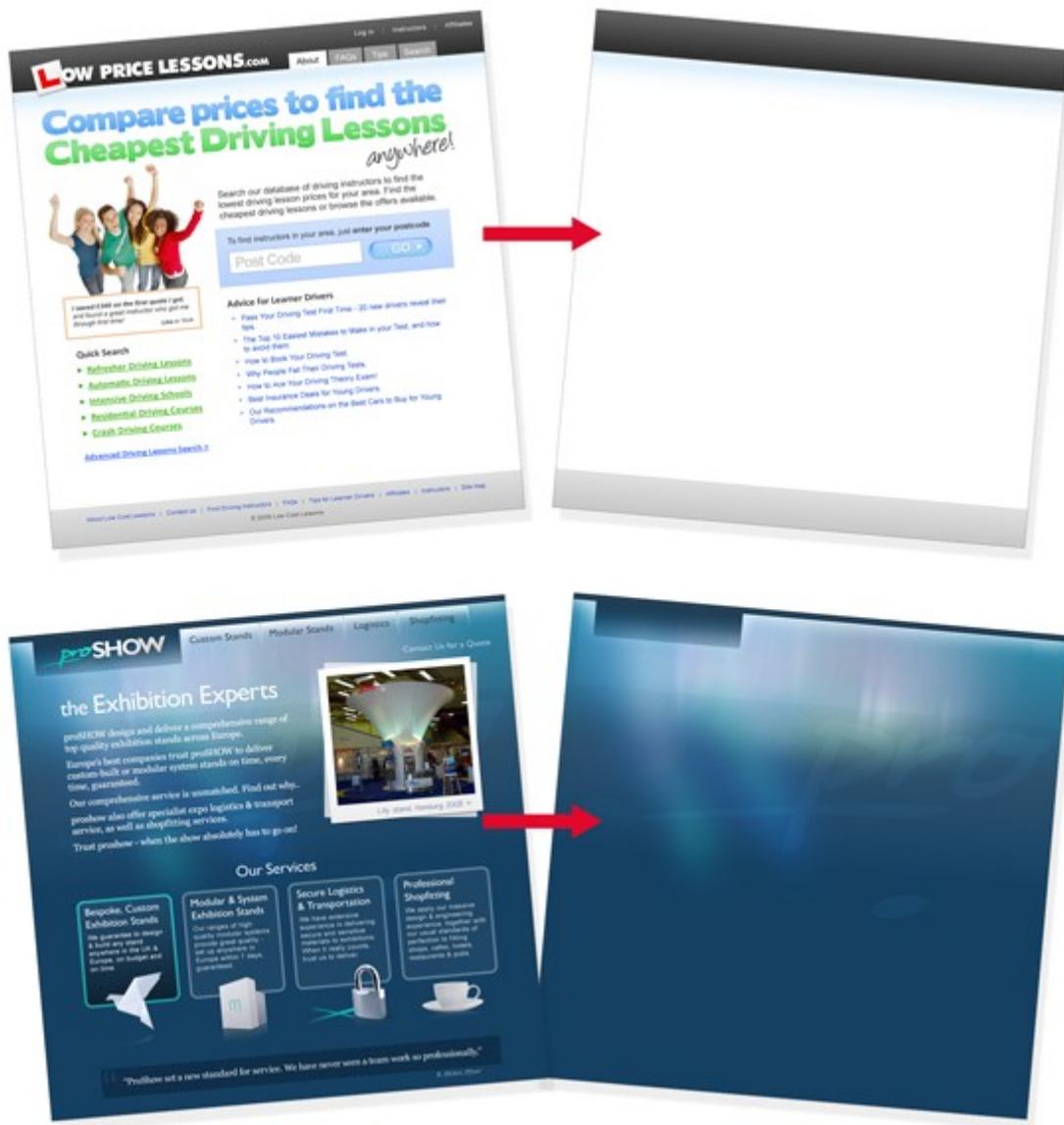
Anything that's big, bold, distinctively coloured, high-contrast, or has dynamic lines, or even moves... all these things draw the eye most.

Now ask yourself, what draws the eye on your web pages?

If you're drawing attention to content, navigation and functions, that's great, because you're helping your visitors get your unique, distinctive message. You're helping them find what they want on your site.

But if your decoration draws the eye, you're drawing attention away from what matters most.

See the two examples below. When I strip out all the signage, branding, content and functions... there's very little left. Nothing strong, bold, or striking that's going to pull you away from what you really want.



It seems to me - and probably to you - that not many of these secrets are directly about web design. Has that crossed your mind?

I'm OK with that. There's a lot of info around on how to make a web site, how to drive traffic, how to do stuff that looks nice, blah blah blah...

What I'm trying to do is fill in the gaps, tell you what every web designer, or web site owner, should know and may not have ever been told.

So bear with me, because this one has nothing to do with designing web pages at all! But it's short, so I hope you'll forgive me.

Secret #31 - "Repeat What Works"

Look at your markets.

Who buys the products and services you sell?

Maybe even draw out those markets on a piece of paper, with circles representing the relative size of each market to your business.

You may define your markets in terms of the type of client, their industry, their job title, how much they spend, or what they actually buy. There are loads of ways of cutting this cake.

(Personally, I prefer to distinguish markets by "What's their problem?" i.e. What's the problem / issue / result / opportunity they want to resolve?)

Now ask yourself these questions:

- Which of these markets is most profitable?
- Which do I enjoy dealing with most?
- Which is easiest, or less painful to deal with?
- Which is least risky?
- Which customers do I make the happiest?
- Which do I care about the most?

Now, if you see the same ones coming up many times, as yourself this final question:

- What would happen if I sacked all the others, and focused all my energy, all my marketing, all my messaging, my whole business... on just these guys that I love?

I think a lot of us are addicted to chasing work we don't love, that we don't do so well, that brings us pain and stress and risk. Maybe because we believe we should never pass up an opportunity.

But, then again, maybe we should. Maybe the secret to greatness in business is knowing who not to deal with.

If there's a large enough population of the people you love dealing with, which generates profits, and which you find fulfilling to serve, take my tip. Throw yourself at that market with all your heart, and enjoy every minute.

Secret #32 - "Products or Services"

Let's step back again and have a look at the kind of business you're in - from the very highest level.

Are you a product company or a service company? Or both?

What do you sell? If it's time, you're in the service business. Do you get paid for each hour you work? That's service.

When you're in service, your earnings are limited by two factors: how much you can charge for a chunk of time; and how much time there is.

Problem is, the market provides a natural ceiling on rates, and there are only so many working hours in a month.

So, in service, to make more money, you have to make more hours. That means you have to hire and train more people, which brings its own costs and risks, as most small business owners know all too well.

With a product business, on the other hand, you're not selling time. You're selling something else. If you have a widget company, you can grow by making more widgets more quickly. You can install another widget machine and optimise your systems to make more profit.

Taking the product concept further, some products are intangible. Like intellectual property. If you own the patent to something, or a brand that makes people want to buy something, you can sell the rights to use your virtual assets, without even shipping anything.

Now, the world will always need product companies and service companies. But I believe it is more attractive to make money through product. That's not to say you can't make good profits by providing services - you can - but there are more natural constraints on growth that will make it more challenging to increase those profits.

The guys at 37Signals recognised this over 10 years ago, and switched from being a very talented web design agency to a very talented product company (article).

So the question I would put to you is.. If you're a service business now, could you also be a product business?

Taking my own business, I have captured the qualities of the services I do in multiple products, which can be re-sold many times over (without requiring extra time): two books (1) (2), one course, and a forthcoming series of video web site reviews.

These products are not only profitable, but they also help me achieve my goal of making the web a better place - which I couldn't do one web site at a time.

So what products could you create and sell?

Secret #33 - "Do You Really Need a Custom Web Design?"

If you have a car, was it custom-built just for you?

What was the last piece of clothing you bought? Was it tailored specially for you?

What about the last piece of furniture you purchased? Was that hand-crafted to your exact specifications?

So why, when we need a web site, do we imagine we need to start from first principles and get a new design hand-crafted in Photoshop and lovingly produced to make a truly original custom web site?

Now, if the results were that much better with a custom build, I'd see the point. But most web designers are not trained. They don't understand marketing. They don't understand how to influence or to sell. They have little appreciation of attracting or converting the right visitors. And they have a perverse view of what graphic design really is.

Yet, the vast majority of the cost of any custom web site will be spent on custom design and custom build. Relatively little is spent on what really matters (strategy, keyword research, intelligent information architecture, and compelling copywriting).

The net result is, most custom-built web sites deliver very bad ROI (return on investment). That's just a fact. A few work great, but the majority of the web is still crap.

At the other end of the spectrum, we have people selling nasty web site templates, which will also deliver rubbish results.

So what do you do to get value from web design? Here are a few ideas..

If you have a truly unique and original concept, talk to a web designer who really has the skills to craft a truly original web site that also works. (But this does not apply to the majority of us.)

I'm a big fan of publishing platforms like Wordpress, and there are a lot of good themes out there, which will remove the majority of the human cost of design & build. So, if you're hiring a web designer, insist that they start with a great theme that will deliver what you need, and spend some time customising it to fit the brand.

Then, focus all your attention on crafting a powerful message, great offers, and creating imaginative content that you know will draw visitors from far and wide.

If the web designer complains, find a different web designer that understands ROI and who puts their client's success before their own profits.

And, before you do anything, research the neighbourhood. Look at all the competition (the ones who rank for the keywords you need to rank for). Look at what works. Which landing pages would make you want to engage with the site? Then ask why.

Finally, learn from those lessons. If something works, whether it's copy, design, layout, navigation, do something like that. Don't reinvent the wheel, unless you really have got money to burn.

Secret #34 - "Learn to Stop Looking at Design"

Design is not meant to be looked at.

It's meant to be looked **through**.

Design is the window that delivers your content. If you notice the window, you're not seeing what's being offered, you're distracted.

- In the same way that if you notice the skill of the film maker, they've failed, because you're not in the experience of the movie.
- Or if you see how an illusionist is doing the trick, the experience is ruined.
- Or a waiter in a fine restaurant, whose whole focus should be on your enjoyment of your meal.

You don't want people to look at your design. You want them to get the experience of the communication, and not notice the design is there.

This raises a paradox for the web designer. We need to learn our craft to the level that we can focus on the end point, and create the mechanisms that deliver that experience for all visitors.

Of course, that means we must focus on the design features, we must master them so that we can express our end result almost without thinking.

Ideally, a designer should be like a jazz musician who plays by feel, whose fingers know the notes and the way the notes work together.

If you pay for traffic to your web site (whether through pay-per-click, or spending your precious time on your own organic SEO) I want you to ask yourself an important question..

Are you doing PPW?

What's PPW? Well, it's the latest thing, and it's all over the web.

Secret #35 - "Pay-Per-Worm Advertising"

Marketing online is a lot like fishing, but more fun. And you don't have to go outside. Or get wet. Or hit anything repeatedly over the head (actually, that one's not always true).

The point is, you're trying to get business (fish).

To do that, you first have to guess where the fish are. Next, you show them something that will attract them, and then you have to hook 'em and reel 'em in.

One great way to attract the fish is to invest in juicy fat worms that they love. If that gets you plenty of bites, and you can land the catch, it's well worth it.

How does that relate to online marketing?

The first part (getting a bite) is attracting traffic. You can do this organically, or you can buy your traffic with PPC (pay-per-click). However you go about it, the more you invest, the more results you expect.

The crazy thing is how many web sites only focus on the first part (getting the traffic) and are very lazy about landing the catch. If you don't have a sharp, powerful hook, you'll lose a lot of worms. And sometimes those worms aren't cheap!

Here's what a smart marketer does.

1 - Test

Test a variety of bait at different places in the river. You may never know what markets are there unless you go looking for them. Don't assume that there's only one type of fish in there just because that's all you've ever seen. Maybe you're using the wrong bait, or you're fishing in the wrong place.

2 - Be Scientific

Measure the returns you get from every campaign. Figure out what gets you the most traffic most cheaply.

3 - Land the Catch

When you get that traffic, make sure you've got a good "hook" - a great offer - and compelling content that answers your prospects' questions, gives them every reason to proceed, and no reason not to.

Pay attention to your conversion, or you'll be wasting a lot of worms!

take a look at your web page and check out its body language...

Your message can take a range of postures: passive or active, soft or strong.

Today, I want to tell you why you **MUST** be commanding and interrupt.

Secret #36 - "Tell People What To Think"

It is very tempting to treat visitors to your website with kid gloves. To be very gentle, and offer them a range of information and options. And then to stand back politely to let them make up their own minds about the options.

What will they do in this situation? They'll get bored, turn and walk out of the door, down the road to the next web site - that gives them what they want.

What do we want when we go to web sites? We want to be told what to think!

The facts are plain. When you take a confident, commanding tone in your marketing, you convert more.

When you're looking for something online - some solution to your problem - what's your real goal?

It's to be confident that you've found what you're looking for, and that you can stop looking.

So, when someone comes to your website, your job is to get them to that point. "You have found what you're looking for."

The way to do that is to TELL THEM. You can't hint, suggest, sow seeds...

You have to stand in front of them, look them dead in the eye, and tell them with confidence...

- that this really is the best whatever-it-is on the market
- the benefits they'll personally get from choosing it
- why they can trust you
- and why they should ACT NOW

Every site or sector has its own boundaries of acceptable conduct. It would not be appropriate to be aggressively salesy on a childcare provider's or undertaker's web site. But, wherever the line is, walk up to it and meet your customers there.

Have I made myself clear?

May I ask you a personal question, as a friend? It's important...

Secret #38 - "How Promiscuous Are You?"

In lots of ways, business and marketing are like dating.

Just like dating, there are different ways to go about it, so you need to find what really works for you, and avoid falling into habits that don't work.

Ideally, every business wants to find its ideal match in the market. But too many are promiscuous, spending too much time courting the wrong customers, sending out the wrong messages, and this can really cost you.

It is tempting to think that you need to:

- chase a lot of different customers,
- say "yes" to any offer,
- avoid turning away any business,
- and keep looking for new customers

But apply the same approach to dating. If you feel you have to date every potential partner that comes along, you'll get a mix of good and bad experiences. But will you be able to spot (and secure) the really good ones when you see them?

Your time, energy and attention will be split. When you do get a great match, you'll still be spending a lot of time dating lots of others, so will you be able to devote the attention to that one really good one? Will you be able to listen to them, to make them feel special, exceed their expectations?

I believe that it is vital to be disciplined when it comes to choosing which prospects to talk to. Choose what you really want and put it out there. If prospects come along that don't look like a good match, don't go there.

Avoid taking on clients and projects that will use up your time and resources, if they're not the right ones.

When you do find a "keeper", you'll be able to devote the right attention to them, and you may find that something amazing happens.

In my previous agency, I used to process maybe 30 sales leads every month. This took time: filtering, setting up calls, writing proposals, and teaching new clients the way we work.

These days, we've shut the doors to new clients. Our team focuses our attention on literally a handful of clients. They get more of our attention and time, because I'm available. I'm not spending my days kissing more frogs, but on making my best clients happy.

And you know what? We're doing better business, and we're doing it with ease. We're doing better work for our favourite clients, getting it done more quickly, and these clients are always ready to come back for more.

With the space this gives us, I know we can give out the exact message, and we can afford to be really choosy about any new business. That was always the case, but I needed the confidence to believe it's possible to break the cycle.

This one's a pearl, a really simple technique that takes minutes and really could transform your marketing.

Secret #39 - "How to Discover Winning Benefits"

A new visitor arrives at one of your web pages. What's the first message they get? Does it speak to the new visitor, does it say "This is for you", and give them reason to proceed?

As we've already seen, a powerful headline needs to do a few basic things to keep more visitors moving forward, but it really comes down to one thing...

Give me a benefit that I can connect with immediately

A headline should be direct, personal, and give me a clear "what's in it for me".

Here's a dead easy trick you can use to turn any wooden headline into a honey trap. It's just three simple words:

"Which means that..."

Take a boring old descriptive headline, like this one I just found:

"We are one of the most professional web design companies around"

Then just add, "Which means that..." and see what's behind it.

We're professional...

Which means that... We know our business.

Which means that... We can give you the best advice.

Which means that... We make growing your business our priority

Which means that... You can trust us with your web strategy and your budget.

It's as easy as that. Just keep asking "Which means that..." and each time you're taking another step nearer to your prospect, nearer to that emotional being who is looking for something.

When you can connect what you're offering with the emotional need of that person on the other screen, you'll increase your ability to turn them from a prospect into a customer.

Secret #40 - "Is your web site a teenager?"

You know how teens spend so much energy trying to be different from the rest of the world... trying so hard to show how unique they are?

Have a look at your web site. Is it trying hard to be different, for the sake of being different?

A lot of testing has been done on first impressions in business and sales situations. For example, you are statistically more likely to get a good result if you go into a meeting wearing a navy blue suit, a tie with red in it, and black shoes.

Quite simply, if you look the part, you'll immediately appear as more trustworthy, more like what your prospect expects.

The same goes for your web site. If you're a corporate marketing site, look like a really smart corporate marketing site.

Ask yourself what your prospects want. Do they really want something that has a weird, original style? Or do they want something that looks right, that they know they can depend on?

Invest your time, money, and energy in creating a unique message, position, and propositions that distinguish you. Don't waste it on dressing "different".

In all my years designing web sites for clients, I can't ever remember a client saying, "We just want it to look really conventional," which is a pity.

Maybe it's because the web is still in its teenage years. Maybe in its twenties, it will start to get its act together and get down to business.

Here's a neat tool you can use to understand any offering, any brand, and any client.

Secret #41 - "Know the Value Triangle"

Here's a neat tool you can use to get insight into any offering, any brand, and any client's needs.

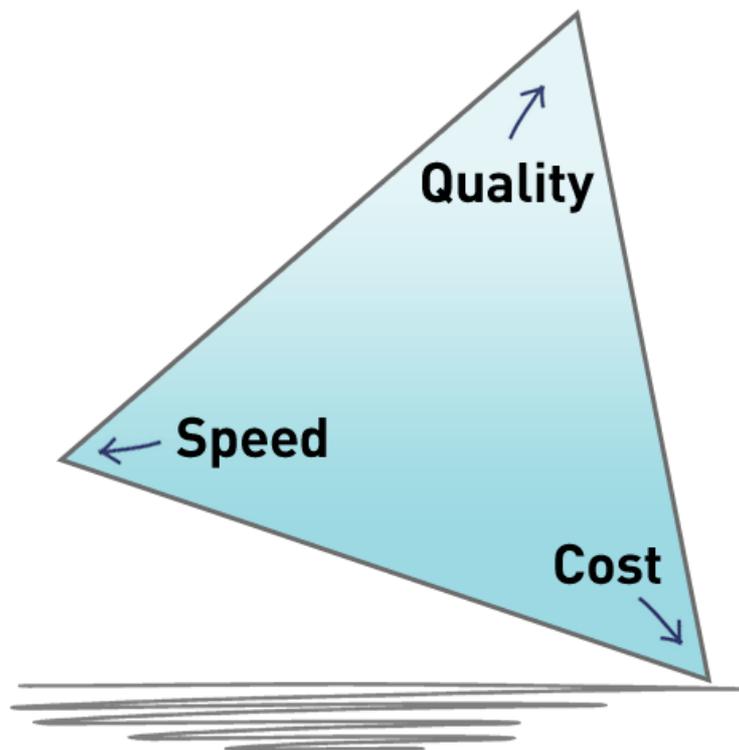
A "sale" is only possible when both parties perceive that the value they are getting from the trade is greater than the value of the thing they are giving up.

You can view the value in almost any transaction in terms of three primary factors:

- Speed
- Quality
- Cost

These three factors make up "The Value Triangle." The general principle is that you have to choose between these factors. You can't have them all.

Here's how a Value Triangle might look visually. In this example, the triangle is rotated to show that Quality is the #1 priority, Speed is fairly important, and Cost is not an issue.



You can show any balance between the 3 value factors by simply rotating the triangle around its central point. You can't have all 3 factors as high priority.

Let's see how you might use the Value Triangle in practice.

Scenario 1: Client's Requirements

A client comes to a web designer and asks for a web site to be built. They want a good standard, and it needs to be built within a short deadline. Oh, and they only have a small budget.

So they're asking for all three factors to be high priority. That's not how the world works.

- If you want a high standard of result, and you need it soon, you need to be prepared to pay.
- If you want a good result, and you want it cheap, be prepared to wait.
- If you want it cheap and quick, don't expect quality.

To put it bluntly, you might say to that client, "Quick, Cheap, Good - pick two."

Scenario 2: Positioning a Service

If you're putting any product or service on the market, people need to know where it fits in relation to what they already know. That's positioning.

Let's say you're marketing your own service (web design, consulting, programming, logo creation, whatever). How would you spin the Value Triangle to represent what you offer?

If I were making a premium web site, I would have something similar to the example above: Quality top, Speed OK, but don't expect it to be cheap.

But remember, for every client, there's a corresponding perfect service. I could just as easily market "Speedy & Cheap Web Design" (which you'd expect to be relatively low quality), "Paratroop Web Consultancy" (which would deliver great services at the drop of the hat - but really cost you), or "Good Web Sites for Businesses on a Budget" (in which case those clients would need to wait).

Scenario 3: Project Priorities

You can use the Value Triangle to help you understand and choose between the priorities in any project or transaction. It will also apply to a project you're running.

In our team, we always have a lot of ideas for things we could do next. If we decide that something has to happen now, the Value Triangle tells us that we either have to sacrifice Quality, Cost, or some balance between the two. If it has to be quick and good, we know we may have to pay to bring in extra help.

Now I want you to forget everything you know about marketing and selling online.

Secret #42 - "Everything you know is wrong"

I have spent the past two years researching and testing what works on the web. I have studied the 20th Century's great marketers, applied best practice to dozens of web sites, and collated the evidence.

The most valuable thing I have learned is that I know absolutely nothing about what makes people buy.

Really. The number one insight I can give you is that whatever you think is likely to work probably won't.

Consider this as Rule #1. There really are no other rules that matter.

One reason for this is that your customers aren't you. They think differently, and they have a very different perception of what they need and what you offer. It's like there's a black box that you cannot ever fully understand - the psychology of your market.

So what can you do? How can you sell when you don't really know what people want?

There are two things you have to do, and one thing you must never do.

The thing you should never do is to assume you do know. Your first best guess is almost certainly far from correct.

What you should do is: test! Previous generations of marketers knew this, and practiced it religiously. They split-test print ads and mail-outs because they knew that it would generate better returns. It is no different today.

The good news is, the web lets you do that more easily and quickly than ever. Where it would have cost thousands of dollars and weeks of time to split-test an advertisement in a newspaper, you can test endless variations of your messaging on your own web sites very rapidly and for very little cost.

Today, my company's core revenue comes from subscriptions to my Pro Web Design Course. I recently spent days crafting a new landing page to promote the course (<http://www.prowebdesigncourse.com/>). But Rule #1 reminds me that my first best guess is not right. So I'm testing.

See the image below:

Combination	Conversion Rate Range	% Improv.	Chance to Beat Original	Conv. / Visitors
Control ?	20.5% ± 8.3%	-	-	8 / 39
Combination 8 ?	29.2% ± 8.4%	+42.19%	83%	14 / 48
Combination 27 ?	28.6% ± 8.3%	+39.29%	81%	14 / 49
Combination 14 ?	28% ± 11.5%	+36.5%	75%	7 / 25
Combination 18 ?	20.8% ± 7.5%	+1.56%	52%	10 / 48
Combination 16 ?	20.8% ± 7.1%	+1.18%	51%	11 / 53

When I created this page, I also created a few variations of the main headings and introductory text. I then used one of the powerful testing tools on the market to serve up random combinations of this content to all visitors.

The tool (Visual Website Optimizer) tracks how many people who see each content combination click through to the pricing page.

This image shows that 20.5% of people who see my first best guess ("Control") are persuaded to click through.

But some of the other combinations engage 42% more visitors. That's potentially 42% more income for my business - from a test that took me less than an hour to set up!

The results are not yet conclusive, but when it has finished I will know which heading and intro text works best.

You know what I'll do then? I'll test again. I'll see whether I can come up with alternative content, rearranged content, more content, which will compel even more people to click through.

Plus we'll also be testing the pricing page itself, to see how many more people we can persuade to take the final step and sign up.

And that's how it goes. I don't know anything. I may have some smart guesses, and some of them may work better than my previous guesses. But until I test, I won't know for sure, and maybe I'll never find out what works best of all.

Consider the economics for your business. Setting up A/B or multivariate tests with a tool like Visual Website Optimizer takes no time at all, and yet can potentially double your revenues, double your leads, double whatever you want people to do on your web site. Or better! I know this, because I've done it.

You don't know what works. Until you test, you'll never be sure. How much money are you leaving on the table? Want to find out?

This one's massive. Fundamental.

Secret #43 - "What You Really Sell"

You don't sell products or services, or their features.

You don't sell your brand, or yourself.

You don't even sell to customers or prospects.

So what do you sell and to whom? Let me tell you exactly how it works.

We'll start with the buyer, because that's the right way round. What you really need to understand is that your customers and prospects are people, emotional beings, and they probably buy from the heart.

You can only sell if there's a need to solve. If your prospect has a conscious need, desire or opportunity, you must answer it.

People don't buy features, they buy WIIFM - what's in it for me? They only invest in making their life easier, happier, or more rewarding. That's it. Whatever we choose to buy, we are motivated emotionally by some self-interest.

The WIIFM comes from the benefits of what you offer. Features are "what it does", whereas benefits are "what it does FOR ME".

Those benefits are not properties of the product or service. Like I said, people don't buy products or services. What they buy is your proposition. A proposition is "this is how this product/service will fulfil your need/desire/opportunity".

Behind the proposition are your products or services, and the features they have. There is also you, the seller, and the values your brand offers.

But none of this really matters. It's not what people buy.

Take a look at your marketing messages. Can you see the WIIFM? Can you see why an emotional being (like you) will get excited and motivated enough to take action? If not, don't expect your prospects to do it.

When was the last time you put yourself in your customer's experience?

Secret #44 - "Clear the Path"

In order for people to buy from you - or take whatever action you want them to take - you have to convert them.

Conversion simply means to take someone from one state and move them to another state.

To convert someone from, say, the state *not-a-customer* to the state *customer*, or from *new-lead* to *tribe-member*... whatever the conversion is, there's a path they have to take from the original state to the goal state.

When did you last walk that path? Is it possible to get from one end to the other?

Ken McCarthy talks about "rocks and holes" in the road. Holes are things that should be there - but aren't. Rocks are things that shouldn't be there - but are.

Take some time and walk the path today. Pretend you're a first-time visitor to your web site. What rocks and holes can you see?

Even better, watch someone else walk the road, and listen to them describe their experience. There's no substitute for a fresh experience, and it's so much easier to see what's wrong with everyone else's marketing.. In the words of Jesus:

"Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?"

You know I'm a big fan of testing. You should be too, and here's why...

Secret #45 - "Test Your Copy"

Pitching the right message in the right way - at the right time - can make a huge difference to how much people engage with your web site.

But can you tell what to say where and when? I bet you can't. I don't know, and I've been studying this stuff for years.

Check out these examples, and see if you can tell which copy won:

1. Save the Pixel text link

- a) "Buy Save the Pixel and improve your site today"
- b) "Buy now for instant delivery"
- c) "You can't afford not to know this stuff - get Save the Pixel now"

2. Contact Scratchmedia call to action

- a) "To make your web project a success, contact Scratchmedia for Great Web Design - guaranteed!"
- b) "Contact us to discuss your web project"
- c) "We'd love to hear about your web strategy. Contact one of our team today!"

3. Main heading on e-commerce site

- a) "Top Quality Towels at Low Prices"
- b) "TOWELS Direct from the MILL"

4. Call to action button, linking through to pricing/buy page

- a) "Show me the Options"
- b) "Yes, I want to sign up"

5. Headline on promotional ad

- a) "Save the Pixel"
- b) "Make Better Web Pages!"

Answers

1.a) got 59% more clicks.

2.b) got 24% more clicks, but c) won with 38% more.

3.a) resulted in 9% more prospects buying

4.a) got 111% more clicks.

5.b) got 104% more clicks.

How did you do? Did you pick the best result each time?

If not, you need to accept you don't know what's going to work in every situation. All you can do is test.

Secret #46 - "Test Your Own Site"

When was the last time you tested your own website? Actually forgot what you think you know, went in from the start, and tried to find your way around?

Even better, get someone else to do it, and watch them. You'll probably get some nasty surprises! You'll want to jump in and help them, to show them their mistakes. (But, of course, they're your mistakes.)

You may think your website is great. There may be bits you love. You could get plenty of traffic and great feedback...

But none of that matters. What matters is Action!

It's meaningless if you get a thousand people every day who enjoy your site, browse around, try to register for something, nearly get there, then give up.

That's like this bridge, which lets you cross most of the way, then it's just impassable.



Unless you walk through your own websites, or watch other people try to do it, you may never know if there are bits of your bridge missing. It doesn't matter how far people get, unless they can successfully take the action you want them to take at the end.

Do you ever feel you've missed the boat, that the lives of others are more interesting and successful? If so, this is for you...

Secret #47 - "Share What You Can See"

It's tempting to think that your experience isn't special, that everybody else already knows everything you've learned.

You have nothing interesting or valuable to blog about, write a book about, or even sell.

On the contrary. Nobody else has your perspective. Your story is unique, and I'll bet there are people right behind you on the path who would benefit from your knowledge.

Sure, the things you learned a few years ago may be old news now. But the herd has moved on. What are you learning right now? What can you see from your unique position on the edge of the herd? What can you share with those following behind you, to help guide, reassure, inspire, inform, or educate?

Time goes by, and the herd moves along. But your particular perspective will always be unique and special.

Don't be afraid to share it.

Want to know where you're probably wasting the most money, and - more importantly - what you can do about it?

Secret #48 - "Prototype Your Web Design"

No significant product, whether it's a car, a perfume, or a child's toy, makes it to market without first being prototyped and tested.

The reason we do this is to figure out whether something is going to work - functionally and commercially - before investing a lot of money finalising its development and launching it.

Yet most websites are still launched blind.

Most websites go live with a complete, polished design, based on a combination of the designer's and the client's personal taste and their best guess of what will work.

This is the way it's always been done, and it's extremely wasteful.

We need a new approach to web design, where we actually test whether a site or page will "work" before spending thousands on fancy design.

Here's the general approach:

1. Guess what the market wants. This involves thinking about problems or opportunities your website can solve, and crafting appropriate propositions.
2. Create a "lo-fi" website or landing pages. Invest in content, not design. Use a conventional design theme that follows standard practice.
3. Drive traffic to these prototype pages using AdWords.

4. Test the various appeals, from AdWords and Analytics data. What appeals make more people click? What pages do they stay to read? What content persuades them to click through?
5. Keep going. Retire appeals that don't work. Try to come up with better messages, and test using the lo-fi approach.
6. When you are confident you have a good appeal, start to refine your messaging and calls to action using split-testing.
7. Finally, apply graphic design in multiple rounds, but split-test each change to make sure your design actually improves conversion.

Using this approach, you'll spend more time crafting content and less time crafting graphics, until you know your "prototype" content works.

You'll invest in buying traffic, which gives you vital market research intelligence based on the way people actually behave. This could be the best money you ever spend on your website.

Because you're working with quick prototype pages, you can test different words and pictures easily, without having to spend time unpicking complex page designs.

You can be confident that if a page works with a rough design, it won't perform any worse as you refine the design. You only need to keep design changes that work.

The new discipline of conversion optimisation is all about getting more people who visit your website to take some action you want them to take.

I have been researching and testing what works for over 2 years now. And here's one tip I think you'll find useful.

Secret #49 - "Plug the Biggest Leaks"

Your website is a complex entity.

People can enter on almost every page - and they do!

They have all kinds of different needs and expectations. How do you keep track as they move from page to page, doing all kinds of different things?

I'd invite you to step back, and imagine your whole website as a complex system of pipes - if you know the Dr. Seuss books, that may help :-)

Water comes into the system at many points. And water comes out of the system at many points!

Some of the water comes out through taps at the bottom, which represents your successful goal completions.

But most of the water leaks out at other points. (Even the best websites lose up to 90% of their visitors before they can persuade them to take action.)

If you stand and look at this complex system, with water spurting out at different points, it's impossible to model it all and understand it in your head. So do this..

Just look for the biggest leak you can see.

Then try to figure out what is causing that leak.

And come up with an idea to fix it. (I would suggest you test to see if your idea works using A/B testing.)

How do you do this on your website? The easiest way is to look in your analytics package, and find the pages with the highest exit rates.

(Ignore bounce rate, that's different, and ignore the minor leaks. Just look for the pages that are leaking the most visitors.)

What are they not getting? What do they need? What could be turning them off? What is too difficult?

Fix that leak as best you can. It may take a few attempts. The pressure in the rest of the system will increase slightly, and you'll spot the next biggest leak more easily.

Follow this simple process and you'll see big results.

We come to the end of this stage of our journey. I really hope you've enjoyed my 50 secrets

Secret #50 - "What could this be a solution to?"

Think about a paperclip.

Now take a piece of paper, and in 2 minutes write down as many possible uses for a paperclip that come to mind. They can be absolutely anything.

Don't hold back, write anything that comes into your mind, any possible use for that piece of bent metal, and get it onto the sheet of paper. Don't criticise your ideas, just let them flow.

Great. Now throw the piece of paper away, and get another one.

Now, take a look at where your income comes from. This is likely to be services or products that you sell.

First, write your products/services on the paper. Group them if you need to.

Now I want you to look those services or products differently. Instead of thinking "What is it?", think, "What could it be a solution to?" Or alternatively, "What problem/need/opportunity could it solve?"

You should be thinking using more of your brain right now. And these questions will give you the access to more money, quite simply.

When you identify problems, needs or opportunities that what you sell can solve, you're on your way to defining new "offerings" that you can sell.

(Because, the truth is, you don't sell those products or services... You sell something else... What those things make possible in people's lives!)

Now go out and market those offerings. They're the bait on the hook.

One last thing!

Secret #51 - "Under-promise and Over-deliver"

Whatever it is you do, strive to delight your customers.

Be honest and fair about your promises. Don't commit to anything that you don't know you can do.

Over-promising is disrespectful of your customers, and also yourself.

And always be looking for that extra service, that special touch, which shouldn't cost you much, but which makes a big difference to your customer.

The satisfaction of realising that a provider has been true to their word is reason enough to turn a customer into an advocate.

Over-delivering on your promises can touch hearts, and turn advocates into fans.

Here's to you. Enjoy everything and be successful in all you do!

Ben