

Five Tips for Creating an Effective U.S. Website

Before we get into the details of how to create an effective website for the U.S. Market, it's useful to understand key characteristics of American audiences.

Which of the below characteristics is true of the U.S. audience?

- Americans are in a hurry
- Americans like things to be simple
- Americans are benefit and not features-oriented
- Americans respond to self interest as well as corporate interest
- All of the Above

Now that you've decided to do business in the States, these are the people you need to understand and to whom you must deliver value... in a way to which they will respond. The 5 tips for creating a successful website that will appeal to American audience, are as follows:

1. Relevant content: Make it brief, clear and to the point

Content describes the text, imagery, audio and video of a site. The site needs to have an American voice, use American colloquialisms when appropriate and generally communicate in a savvy, no-nonsense style that pushes the *benefits* of your products or services rather than the nuts and bolts of why your product or service is great. On the practical side, all copy, including press releases should point to U.S. related news. I strongly recommend engaging a professional U.S. copywriter to help you tailor your content to meet the needs of the U.S. audience.

2. Brand Strategy: What makes you different and why does that matter?

America is a land of brands. People here identify with corporate cultures as well as products and

services. Even in Business-to-Business marketing, it is important to understand the competitive landscape and position your company to differentiate yourself in this marketplace. The generic, hard sell will not work. As a foreign company entering a new market, you also need to understand your audience and what needs they may have that aren't being met by the competition. Then you'll be in a position to craft unique messages and establish a website that makes it clear to visitors why to consider your company.

3. Navigation: Keep it simple

It's tempting to include as much information as one can on a home page. You never know who may visit...unless you look at your analytics, which a surprising number of firms still do not do.

Americans view the homepage like it's both the cover of a book and its table of contents. They expect to be drawn in by a compelling message and great design and to be directed quickly to relevant content. If your value proposition is clear enough, and you can speak with the brevity favored by U.S. audiences, you will successfully guide the visitor on a concise information path of your choosing. Too many websites have multiple agendas, audiences and messages and present a confusing array of options, leaving the visitor confused, frustrated or bored. In a nutshell, keep it simple.

Some Navigation Tips

When thinking about navigation, again, consider your audience.

- If you are in many markets, perhaps the main navigation should reflect that multi-market strategy,
- If you have several distinct buyers, then, perhaps the navigation should establish

unique pathways for those different users,

- Or, maybe there are a handful of business problems you regularly solve. A navigation scheme that allows users to identify with these problem areas might be the most intuitive navigation approach.

There is no one right way. By understanding your audience, you will better be able to create the web experience that best addresses them.

4. Design: Design sells

Design is a strategic tool for visualizing your brand strategy. The use of color, fonts, imagery and interactivity such as Flash are all ways to help you focus the user and differentiate your company. Although American audiences are analytical, they still respond to emotional cues. When I work with clients, I often begin with an exercise of printing out the homepages of all of their competitors and even a few companies they admire. When we lay them all out on a large table it is clear what are the predominant colors, image styles and navigation used in their market. This will be instructive for understanding the American business landscape in your field. You will then be prepared to determine how to differentiate from what's out there. At this point you will need a professional web designer to bring your brand to life.

5. Optimize your Website: Learn from your audience

Your website should be the hub of your marketing effort. All of your other marketing activities should lead prospects and customers back to your website to learn more or fulfill offers. The entire site should be “offers-oriented.” Every page should include some kind of “call-to-action,” a way for the user to interact with your company.

Your website content should be optimized by including key words and phrases that visitors will use to find you. By carefully embedding the right key words and phrases into your web code and content, your website will be more visible to search engines and more intuitive to web visitors.

Finally, to maintain relevance of your website, something critical in the U.S. market, you need to have your web designer set up a basic Google Analytics account. This will enable you to view user behavior and clearly see which areas of your website are most frequently visited or whether users are leaving the website after they get to the homepage. This data will be instructive in ascertaining whether you are successfully reaching your U.S. audience. If you understand the character of the U.S. audience and focus on the 5 points I've discussed, you will be in a great position to succeed with your new website!

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