

The Role of Web Sites in B2B

American companies have been deploying corporate web sites since the early 1990s, and through the years these web sites have been completely integrated in the way companies evaluate other companies and their products.

Pre-Sales

When a prospective customer or partner becomes aware of your company and its products as a result of your marketing efforts or through a referral by a friend, typically their first action is to go to the company's web site to determine whether further action is warranted. Initially they want to get a quick understanding of whether your company and products may meet their requirements and needs.

When a prospect is visiting your web site for the first time, in most cases, the first impression of your company will be through your web site, before you will have any opportunity to speak with them. Also, even when you have been able to convince a prospect to meet with you, it is likely they will use your web site to prepare for the meeting.

The following are questions a prospect may want to get answered when visiting a web site for the first time, and what the designer of the web site can do to address these questions:

How real is the company?

- Projecting a general impression of professionalism of the web site: contemporary design, graphics.
- Providing customer references.

Is there a potential fit with the company with respect to its mission and expertise?

- Presenting an effective description of the company profile, including target customers/industries.

Does the company offer the solutions that we need?

- Showing a high level product overview giving the prospect a quick understanding of what solutions you offer.

Why should I consider buying from this company?

- Demonstrating an effective, high level value proposition.

If prospects do not get satisfactory initial answers to these questions, then it is unlikely that they will further pursue exploring a relationship with your company.

The following are examples of aspects that negatively impact the experience of the initial visit:

- Spelling mistakes. Please note that in some cases American spelling is different from British spelling.
- Information being out of date. If the latest corporate news presented on the web site is dated 2006, that is a bad sign.
- Important messages are drowning in too much clutter.
- The web site is emphasizing details of the product technology vs. the business value it is intended to bring to the customer.
- Lack of focus on target industries. Prospects will be concerned that the company will not understand their specific industry-related problems.
- Unclear contact information, or only a contact outside the US is given.

Only after the prospects' questions have been answered satisfactorily, they will use the web site to obtain additional information, e.g. by downloading product specifications and success stories, and will further engage you by contacting you.

Post-Sales

Many companies have password protected sections on their web sites for customers and partners.

Typical functions provided through these sections are:

- Getting order status
- Ability to download manuals and detailed technical documentation
- Entering problem reports, and obtaining status of problem reports

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