



**Improving the leverage of your brand online.** In the interest of helping you plan your next web site update, I offer the following observations of the most common mistakes committed in the development of online branding initiatives.

*Mistake #1: The “If you build it, they will come” Web Site.* Imagine if your television had millions of channels. How realistic would it be for a television producer to believe that if his program were simply on the air, everyone would find it and love it? It takes marketing to drive traffic to a web site. And there is no substitute for a robust online and print advertising budget.

*Mistake #2: Letting the IT Department Design and Control the Web Site.* I don’t understand the rationale: “If it’s on a computer, IT is in charge”. The typical online consumer views the web as an experience - managed through design - not as a technology. IT has a role, but it should be following, not leading the creative initiative.

*Mistake #3: The “What-Was-That-All-About” Web Site.* You’ve seen them...many produced by major corporations. You visit the web site and you wonder, “Why did they build this?” Perhaps the audience seems unclear, or the content doesn’t really appear cohesive. Such web sites are often built as a competitive response instead of being a strategic

initiative. The problem is, the executives who issued the directive to build it failed to consider the nature of their business objectives, who their audiences are, and what the company’s communication goals should be via the web site. Seems like a sound place to start, strategically. But often those executives pushing online initiatives proclaim, “We don’t have time or money for all of that,” or worse yet, “Here’s what I want you to do” without being concerned with a strategy.

*Mistake #4: The “soft” Launch.* When was the last time you saw a television network run a commercial that wasn’t quite finished? Only on the web will you hear people say, “Let’s just get it up and running, and we’ll go back in and fix it on the fly.” On the web, you’ve got one chance to make a first impression. If you burn your audience members during their first encounter, they’re unlikely to return for a second chance. Examine the basis for your launch deadline. When someone insists that the site must launch on a certain date, ask why. If the answer seems vague or insufficient, keep asking why until he tells you, “My bonus depends on it,” or hopefully, “Okay, we can push the launch back until we get it right.”

*Mistake #5: Forgetting to Include the Audience in Web Development.* There are those who claim, “We don’t have time or money to talk to users.” Often, they believe mistakenly that trial and error is a better method. Sure, you’ll eventually find the option that works best among the

choices you present. But it is not optimal, because superior alternatives may exist that haven’t been identified. All web sites have a common goal: To communicate with an audience. Whether your web site is about selling your services or merely to entertain, your audience likely knows more about what will click with them than you do. So before you build it, ask them. Should you even build a web site? If so, what is its purpose? What should be on it? What is the best way to execute the imagery, language, tonality and features?

**To Splash Or Not To Splash?** A web site is usually entered one of two ways. Visitors are taken directly to (A) a “home” page with content, or (B) the site has a “splash” page, which functions like a glossy cover on a book or magazine.

A splash page is, generally speaking, an entry page that offers no navigation into the site itself except for a link to enter the site. Because having a splash page means that the viewer has to click to enter the site, it’s important that it in some way holds the promise of “good stuff inside,” making the visitor want to enter and spend time on the site.

An alternative to a “splash” or “home” page is a hybrid splash-home page: a page with all of the cover-page qualities of a splash page, but also points to the content behind it.