Websites with Purpose

6 HUGE Website Mistakes that could Cost You Thousands

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Buying a Website

Business owners have never had so many choices and decisions to make when it comes to buying a website. New technologies are constantly creating new opportunities but they also create new traps that can be expensive.

In an age when your website can be the most powerful marketing tool you have, getting your website wrong can cost you many thousands of dollars. I have drawn on my years of experience in this industry to compile my list of the 6 most common mistakes people make when buying or building a website. I hope this list can be of help to you.

Rod Farrell

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HUGE MISTAKE NUMBER 1

Buying on Price Alone

I can already see your eyes rolling and thinking, "here is the pitch to get me to spend more". On the contrary, I often tell people to spend less on their website than they had planned.

Buying the cheapest website you can find or buying the most expensive you can afford are both equally dangerous decisions.

Spending Too Much

Too often I see a business owner decide that they have X dollars to spend on their website and *surprise surprise surprise*, that is exactly the amount their website developer quotes them to build their new site. The problem with this approach is that the website also needs to be marketed so if you blow your budget on the site and do no marketing, no-one will ever see it and it will never make you any money.

Building a website is only the first step. For Google to find and highly rank your website it wants to see good content, properly constructed right now, and new content and links being added over time. This is Search Engine Focused marketing and your website will not be found by new customers without it.

Obviously there is no point spending thousands of dollars on a website that no-one can find. If you want your website to contribute to your business and make you more money you will need an ongoing marketing program that feeds Google the content and updates that it wants to see.

The Real Cost of Going Cheap

So does that mean you should buy the cheapest website you can find or maybe even get one of those free ones that seem to pop up regularly for short periods of time? *Absolutely not!* Some cheap websites will never be found by Google because they are not able to be structured correctly. To get traffic to these sites you will be forced to spend hundreds or even thousands of dollars each month on marketing such as pay per click advertising. A cheap website may be the most expensive one you ever buy.

So What is the Right Price?

Before thinking about the cost of the website you need to write down what you need the website to do for you. Make a list of the features you need now and the features you may need in the future. If you want people to find your website on Google (and who doesn't) then you need to include Search Engine Optimisation features in your list as well.

You may not need to include all of these features now but you should make sure they can be added when you need them. There is nothing more frustrating than having to rebuild your site from scratch (and pay for it all over again) because you chose a software platform that won't grow with you.

It is not enough to just have a presence on the web. You have two groups that have to be catered for by your website to make it work for you. Google and paying customers. A website doesn't have to be expensive to meet these needs but don't presume that all cheap websites do or indeed all expensive websites.

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Google - Just because a site looks good it doesn't mean that it is structured properly to maximise Google's interest. Many cheap websites don't have the structure or the ability for you to make the ongoing changes needed to optimise your website and keep it optimised for search engines. This means properly created headings, image alt tags, titles, hyper-links, meta data, targeted urls etc. And you need to be able to change these in the future as search engines regularly change the way they rank all of this data. If you are on a limited budget you should ensure that your site is built on a modern flexible open-source CMS that provides you with the right tools to make future changes.

Paying Customers – While Google likes to see lots of pages, your customers want to get the information they need and respond with the minimum number of mouse clicks possible. Your site should allow you to have targeted landing pages (each with its own metadata), response forms anywhere on any page and easily seen contact details on every page. Most importantly you must be able to test and measure responses and quickly modify pages that are not generating the responses you want.

Not all cheap websites are bad – but look beyond the initial price at the features and flexibility they offer. Look at how your website fits within your overall marketing budget and consider the overall cost in terms of site hosting, maintenance and marketing as well as potential risk.

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HUGE MISTAKE NUMBER 2

Buying a Website that is built with Proprietary Software

I recently was approached by a business that had secured a supplier contract with Australia's largest Telco. A condition of the contract was that their ecommerce website had to share data with the Telco's SAP buying system and this had to be in place within a short period of time.

Unfortunately they had purchased a website that was built on proprietary software and the developer decided that he wasn't interested (or possibly able) to create the necessary integration leaving the business owner with the prospect of losing a very lucrative contract. In the end we had to scrap the existing website and build a new one from scratch so the original website investment was lost.

Many website developers like to develop their own software or CMS for the sole reason that it locks their customers in to them. They are the only ones with access to make changes to the website (often at high hourly rates). Usually you will find that you have to host the site with the software owner as well, losing even more control over this crucial business asset. Hosting is often on a one or two year contract and sometimes you can't even get your domain name back during this period if you want to start over.

You also face the risk that the proprietary software owner could go out of business. If your website is built on a proprietary platform hosted by the owner of that platform and they go out of business your website could disappear overnight or fade away as the provider loses market share. Look at Myspace.com as an example.   In 2006 Myspace was the most popular free website provider and the most visited website in the world. That popularity rapidly fell away to the point where it ranked 220 in the world in February 2013. Businesses who created their websites on Myspace suffered a similar loss of visitors. Since then other free website platforms have come and gone much to the disappointment of the businesses that used their services.

There is a very good reason that the three biggest website platforms today (Wordpress, Joomla and Drupal) are all open source projects. If your website is built on one of these three platforms you will have no problem finding developers who can work on your site, you can host almost anywhere and thousands of developers are creating new extensions for these platforms every day so your site can grow in any direction your business might go in the future.

In the last year we have built Joomla websites ranging from 5 page information sites to ecommerce sites (large and small), membership sites, document download sites, sites with online booking systems, multimedia and multilingual sites and much more.

Proprietary software cannot compete for features with open source software and will limit your choices in hosting, developers and functionality while increasing your risk.
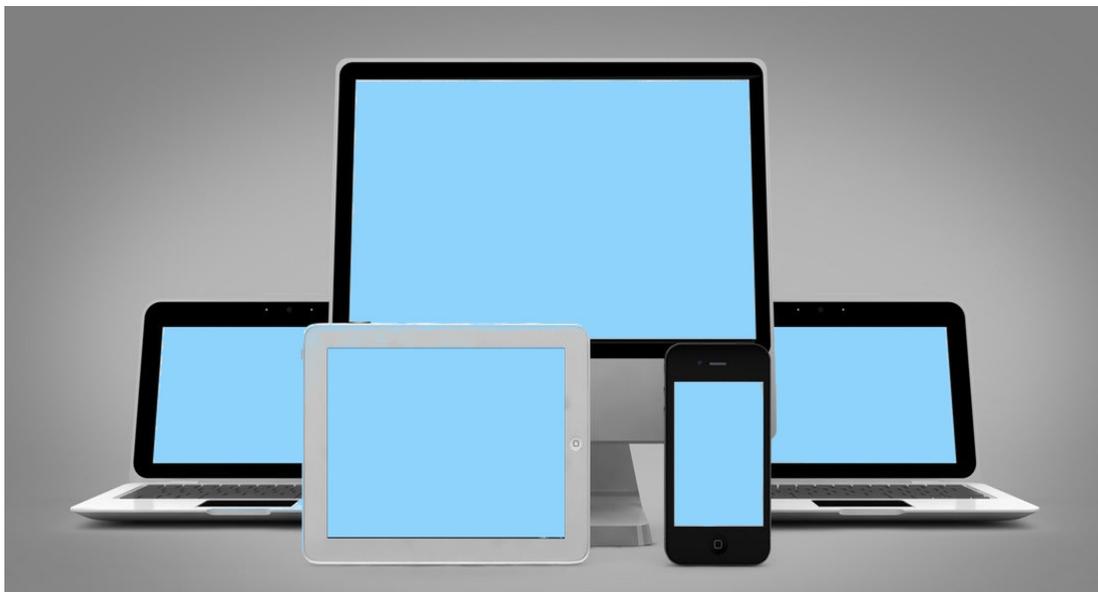
HUGE MISTAKE NUMBER 3

Buying a Website that is not accessible on all mobile devices

Did you know that 30% of your prospective customers browse the internet on a mobile device such as a smart-phone or tablet? If your website doesn't specifically cater for those customers you will lose sales. Most businesses are missing out with an estimated 95% of websites not being tablet friendly even though statistics show that tablet users are 4 times more likely than smartphone users to make an online purchase. Fortunately it has never been easier to build websites that are smartphone and tablet friendly.

As smartphones became a more significant part of the browser mix we had to build alternate templates or even websites for each new device and this became harder and harder with the growing number of different screen sizes and compatibility issues. More recently RESPONSIVE templates have been developed enabling us to build websites that respond automatically to the device and screen size being used. We can designate where content should be displayed on different screen sizes or even hide particular content, such as larger graphics, on some devices. This is a fantastic development that means all devices can be catered for more easily and development of websites that meet the needs of all of your prospective customers is faster and cheaper.

It doesn't cost any more to have a responsive website and if your developer is not recommending that as a matter of course you should be asking why.
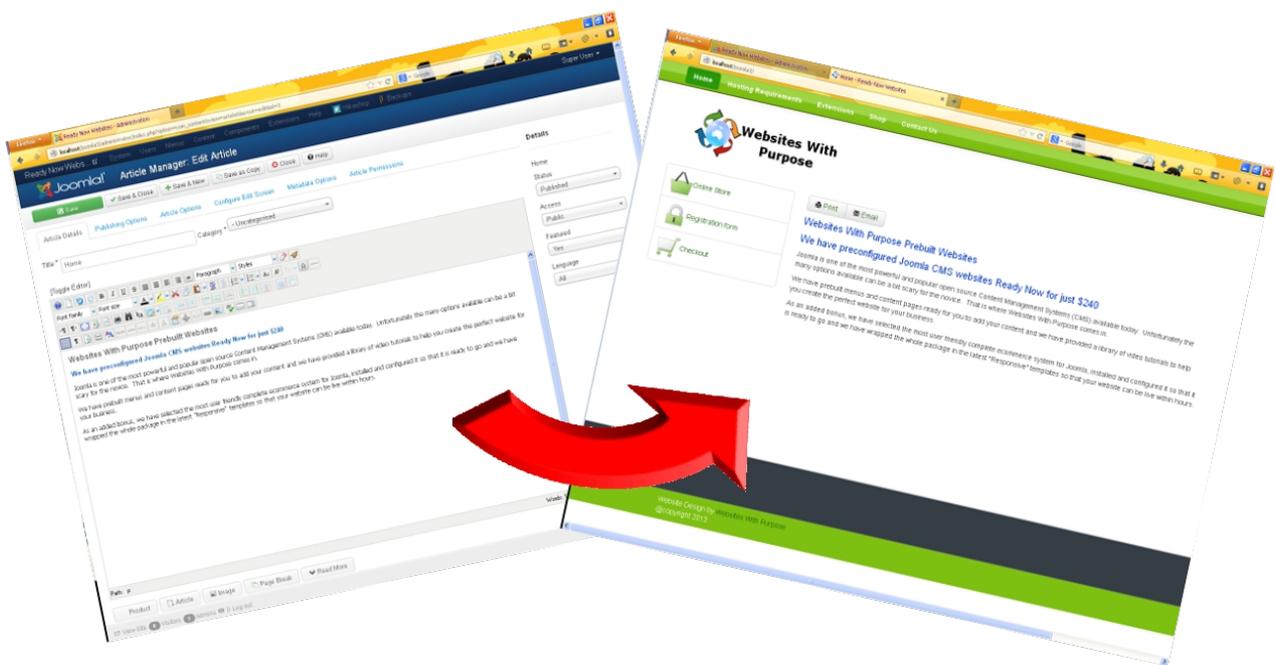
HUGE MISTAKE NUMBER 4

Buying a Website that You Can't Edit Yourself

Have you heard the one about the business owner that had to pay over $100 to have the phone number changed on their website? I have. Over and over. Buying a static site that you can't edit the way you would an office document leaves you to the mercy of the website developers. Often the cheapest websites are the most expensive to maintain.

That is why Content Management Systems (CMS) have become the most popular website platform, and open source CMS like Wordpress, Drupal and Joomla the most popular of all because it is easy and cheap for you or an employee to maintain your site. I have many clients whose site is effectively maintained by the office receptionist. If you're too busy or simply don't want to maintain your website yourself, there is a much bigger choice of developers with knowledge of these platforms to choose from.

Self Edit CMS websites are no more expensive than hard coded html sites but are much cheaper to maintain.

HUGE MISTAKE NUMBER 5

Buying a Website that is not Google Friendly

As mentioned at item 1, buying a website that looks good is pointless whether you spend $150 or $15,000 on it. If Google can't see or doesn't like your site it's a waste of money.

There are many aspects that Google looks at when deciding how to rank your site – far too many to cover here. And they change regularly. The original design needs to properly use heading tags, alt tags, metadata, internal and external links, titles etc but equally important is your ability to change and fine tune these elements.

Many cheap "website in a box" type sites are sold by companies that simply don't try to make them Google friendly because the promoters have other marketing strategies that they want to sell to you to make up for the shortcomings of your website. This is a favorite strategy of directory operators and the like who's main aim is to sell you a directory listing.

A website that no-one can find is a waste of money.

HUGE MISTAKE NUMBER 6

Trusting your Marketing Strategy to a Programmer

Let's get this point understood. Your website is about marketing not about IT. I am constantly amazed at the number of business people who leave decisions on this critical marketing tool in the hands of a young programmer who has never been in business for himself.

Your website should be at the heart of your marketing strategy. As such all design and functionality decisions should be made with the marketing strategy in mind not as stand alone decisions based on the technology preferences of the programmer. The technology is nothing but the enabler of the marketing strategy.

Having said that, internet marketing is a specialised field in its own right and you should be listening to people with this specialised expertise.

Start with your marketing strategy, get advice from online marketing specialists and then choose the technology solution that supports your marketing strategy not the other way round.
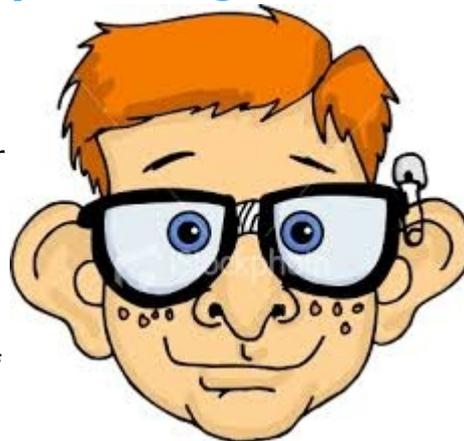
About Rod Farrell

Rod Farrell has over 20 years experience in small and medium business management and over 12 years in website design, development and marketing. He founded Websites With Purpose in July 2009.

The business specialises in producing Joomla CMS websites designed to produce results for business owners. These range from large ecommerce systems to prebuilt websites for businesses on constrained budgets.

Rod has extensive experience with html (12+ years), Joomla and Joomla extensions modification and creation (6+ years) php and CSS programming.

Rod also has extensive experience in Search Engine Optimisation and Search Engine Marketing of Joomla websites.

Websites With Purpose is based on the Gold Coast, Queesnland Australia and currently has clients in Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, South Africa and Middle East.

Want a no obligation discussion about your website needs? Rod can be contacted at Websites With Purpose

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