

10 Costly Website Mistakes

(And How To Avoid Them)



“How did this happen?”

“Why didn’t they tell us that in the beginning?”

“It’s going to cost *how* much to fix?!”

Over the years, my firm has been called upon to help fix, mitigate, or otherwise unsnarl many a website calamity. One might suspect that an inept web development firm or a client’s skimpy budget was the cause. But that was rarely the case. Usually, the firm selected was perfectly competent in its area of expertise and the client had invested a healthy sum (and then some) into the development of the website. So exactly how did it happen that the client ended up with a website that wasn’t engaging, didn’t foster interactions or drive sales, and underperformed all around? Based on my years of experience in interactive, online, and website development, I’ve identified the top 10 causes for these costly disasters. I’ll outline them in detail in this [white paper](#).



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Doug has over 20 years of experience working with some of the world’s top brands to develop highly effective websites, digital marketing, and online advertising campaigns ([full bio](#)).

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#10 Beginning Without Clearly Defined Goals

Science fiction author Robert Heinlein once wrote:

In the absence of clearly-defined goals, we become strangely loyal to performing daily trivia until ultimately we become enslaved by it.

The same is true when it comes to building a website without setting clear goals. Before embarking on any website development project, it's imperative to fully define the purpose of your website and decide how you're going to measure your site's performance.

The first step is to define what action you want the user to take as a result of visiting your site. For example, you may want the user to:

- Add a product to the cart and purchase it
- Subscribe to an email list
- Download a white paper
- Request a quote
- Sign up for a free trial of your product/service
- Call your company to order your product/service

Say you decide that the goal is to get users to sign up for a free trial. You'll want to track sign-ups and overlay your site's Google Analytics data on unique visitors, pages visited, bounce rate, etc. This will empower you to optimize your site's content by testing which images, body content, and call-to-action messages generate the most sign-ups. You'll also want to clearly define goals for your social media and SEO efforts and integrate the performance data for each into the overall performance equation.



#9 Hiring a Firm That Doesn't Respect Your Time

Development of a website for your brand or company requires an investment of time from you (and/or your in-house team) to provide assets, feedback, and approvals to the development firm you hire. There are monetary and opportunity costs associated with that time.

Ever have a meeting that feels like déjà vu all over again? You cover the same things as the last meeting but the firm didn't have the right people in the room the last time. That's poor project management on the firm's part. It's the job of the project manager to ensure that if e-commerce is going to be a subject of discussion, there's someone from the firm present who can intelligently discuss e-commerce and ask appropriate questions.

You also shouldn't have to waste your time to pointing out rookie design mistakes and fit and finish issues. Your development firm should have their own rounds of internal review and methods for quality control. If they have your slogan wrong or the colors don't match what's prescribed in your brand's style guide, the firm should correct those issues long before you ever see the proofs.

Consider the value of the time that could be wasted during the span of the project. What is twenty hours of your time worth? What about a hundred hours? Hiring a firm that doesn't respect your time can literally cost your business thousands of dollars extra. So be sure to ask about a prospective firm's project management skills and quality assurance protocols.



#8 Hiring a Firm Staffed Only By Programmers

While the technological aspects of website development are important, there are many other website tasks that are equally important, and much more challenging to get right. Firms staffed exclusively by programmers and developers may excel in the coding of your site, but often lack the marketing, communications, copywriting, and behavioral psychology skills that are needed to engage and motivate the consumer.

The development of a successful website requires seven distinct skillsets. They are:

- Project Management
- Marketing Strategy Development
- Information Architecture
- Copywriting
- Design
- Web Development/Programming
- System Administration

Depending on your specific website needs, you may also need to choose a firm with specialists in e-commerce, social media, and SEO. Look for a team that's well-rounded and skilled in all the essential areas of web development.



#7 Short-Circuiting The Planning Stage

Several times a year I encounter a company pushing its web design firm to develop a website on an extremely compressed timeline. Often, it's so that the site can go live on a date that was arbitrarily chosen by the company's CEO. These rush jobs rarely result in an impactful and effective website. Quite often, it adds a substantial amount of expense to the back end of the project when whole sections of the site have to be redesigned/redeveloped.

Moving quickly on a project is fine as long as critical protocols, processes, and approvals don't get circumvented. You wouldn't begin construction on a house without a solid strategy and a good blueprint. So why would you begin building a website without the same planning? Every web development project should begin with a needs analysis that results in a basic design brief that details the goal of the site, the audience, the online and brick and mortar competition, etc. Next, comes the development of detailed wireframes and a corresponding site map. Then comes delivery of design proofs that illustrate the proposed look and feel of the site. Only after the completion of these essential steps should implementation work begin. The idea being that major edits will occur during the blueprint stage rather than after the build-out begins.

Also, try to avoid insisting on any substantive changes after the implementation work has begun. Depending on the scope of the changes, it could put the whole rollout at risk. Major adjustments should be pushed to a second implementation phase.



#6 Building Without An SEO Strategy

If you were going to open a brick and mortar business, you would first find a good location and create signage that makes it easy for customers to find you. Makes sense, right? Online success requires the same type of planning. Before you begin development of your website, be sure to integrate a sound Search Engine Optimization (SEO) strategy. Ensure that your SEO specialist has a seat at the table for the initial planning sessions, and have him or her weigh in at critical milestones, especially during site map approval, wireframe approval, and copy development.

As an added benefit, you'll find that the SEO planning process will give you insight into your prospective customers' interests, how they think about your product category, and even the terminology they use to refer to your product type. Many companies find success by leveraging SEO research to develop their online marketing and advertising copy. So why not use it to better connect with your customers? *Google Adwords' Keyword Planner* can help yield valuable information to help you optimize your site structure, page and section titles, and page content.



#5 Building Without A Social Media Strategy

A website is just one component of an effective online communications strategy. Once you have clear plan for how customers and prospective customers will be engaging with your brand via social media, you can then design your website in light of that information. This will impact everything from home page design to the site's navigation.

Remember, in most cases social media should be driving traffic to your website, not the other way around. Once you get the consumer to your website, capitalize on that engagement to present more detailed product information, special offers, and reasons to return. Just as with SEO strategy, your social media strategy will help dictate your site structure, placement of content, length of copy, and the call to action.



#4 No Solid Communications Strategy

So the new website is online. It looks fantastic and everyone in your company loves it. There's only one problem: nothing is happening. Visitors aren't engaging with the content and sales conversions are practically non-existent. What you may have is a very expensive online bookmark. This often happens when a website is developed without a solid communications strategy.

An effective, engaging website presents a compelling brand story and illustrates precisely how the product or service will benefit the consumer. Supporting information must be presented in a way that's highly accessible but that doesn't clutter the site. The call to action must be clear and concise, and the company's contact info should be easy to find. This all may sound easy enough but executing it properly can be tricky. That's why it's important to hire a firm staffed with people who specialize in information architecture and marketing.

While online enables you to create an infinite number of pages, the consumer has a very limited amount of attention. Therefore, it's important to make the most of every pixel. Each page of your website must work towards your goal of furthering the brand-consumer relationship, from engagement to brand loyalty.



#3 Neglecting Usability Testing

One only needs to remember the botched rollout of healthcare.gov to understand the importance of usability testing prior to launch. Usability testing is integral to the success of your website so be sure to allow plenty of time for it prior to roll-out. Based on the results, you may need to rework select areas of the site. Test for usability across a full range of platforms, devices, and locations using the following categories:

- User Experience
- Readability
- Accessibility
- Site Navigability
- Website Speed

When conducting usability testing, it's crucial to select people representative of your target customers. If your website's target audience is men over sixty-five, don't use people in their early twenties. The best usability testing takes into consideration where the end user will likely be accessing the site (e.g., home, office, on-the-go), devices he or she may use (laptop, tablet, smartphone), possible bandwidth issues, and human nature.



#2 Forgetting Security & Backup Protocols

Every day, thousands of Brute Force and DDoS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks threaten websites of companies both large and small. Don't assume that your web development firm is handling all aspects of securing your site and your data. Some smaller firms may either gloss over the importance of security and backups or they may assume that your in-house webmaster will be handling these tasks.

Before you hire a web development firm or digital marketing agency, ask them to detail precisely how your site will be protected against cyber attacks and hacking, and (if they're providing a maintenance plan for you) what the response protocol would be if an attack is ever successful. Without a rock-solid system in place to thwart cyber attacks and to back up your website and your site's data daily, you risk losing tens of thousands of dollars and, even worse, the loss of credibility with your customers.



#1 Neglecting the Human Element

You might end up with the most cleanly coded and technologically advanced website ever developed, but if the human (known as your customer) doesn't like it or can't use it, it fails the test.

We've all seen websites that are difficult to navigate, too visually cluttered, and crammed full of meaningless jargon. Often, this happens when a company's need to tell its story overrides the consumer's need for relevant, easy-to-find content. The cure is to develop a keen sense of empathy for the end user. Try to gain an intimate understanding of your target consumer's hopes, dreams, fears, and daily life. This will help you better understand how to communicate effectively with the consumer and your newfound empathy will shine through in your new website.

Final Thoughts

Your website is your brand's online lifeline. Be sure to communicate your respect for the consumer by providing an experience that's engaging, intuitive, and rewarding. Best of luck to you in your online endeavor!

About Saltworks

Saltworks is a Utah web design, development, and digital marketing and advertising agency. We create engaging experiences online that are both meaningful for the consumer and profitable for your brand. Let's talk!

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