

Museum Marketing Tips

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Nine Common Marketing Mistakes Museum Websites Make

by Katherine Khalife

I love visiting museum websites. Good thing, because in the course of my work I have to visit a lot of them. Many knock my visual socks off with the creativity and artfulness of their designs, but I also see some all too common -- and frustrating -- marketing mistakes. Is your website guilty of making any of them?

No Location Listed on the Front Page

Hmmm . . . "The Salem Museum." Let's see, is that in Oregon, Massachusetts, Illinois or India? At many websites I'm four clicks in before I find out. This is by far the most common marketing mistake I encounter. And it's one of the most frustrating. Your website reaches a global audience, not just the people in your hometown. Be sure your location is prominently listed on your opening page.

Slow Loading

When people surf the Web they leave their patience at home. No matter how impressive all those snazzy graphics are, if a page takes more than 10 seconds to load, frustrated surfers are

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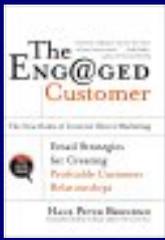
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likely to give up and move on to another -- faster -- site.

Gee Whiz! Technology

Just because it *can* be done doesn't mean it should be. Many people are still new to the Internet or are surfing with older browsers. They may not be able to access flash or splash pages, for example, or they don't have a clue what to click on when links don't look like links. And then there's my personal favorite -- home pages with the little message that says, "This site is designed to be viewed with Browser xxxx. (And, ha! You don't have it!) Download it here." If I wanted to download it, chances are I already would have. Besides, how do I know your site is going to be worth all that trouble?

Difficult Navigation

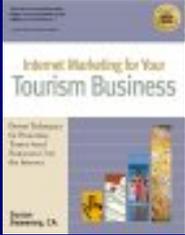
You've spent a lot of time and hard work developing content for your website. Make sure your visitors can find it once they're there. Links should be obvious and every page needs to contain a navigation bar.

This is especially important in light of the fact that many of your visitors won't be entering your site from your home page. If they find you as a result of a search engine query, for example, they're likely to enter on an interior page that matched their search phrase. Once they arrive, though, they'll probably want to explore other pages of your site as well. Don't strand them in navigation hell with no way to do that. At the very least, include a link back to "home" on every page.

Outdated Information

You offer rug hooking classes. Great! Oops . . . that was in 1999. Coming in 2000 is your new HarvestFest event. Wonderful! But where is *this* year's schedule?

While I've not actually kept count, I can safely say that the vast majority of museum websites I visit contain information that's out of date. Besides being frustrating, update neglect can also be bad for business. Consider this: A recent study done by the Travel Industry Association of America (TIA) found that the majority of trips planned online are planned two weeks or less in advance -- with a full 20 percent being planned less than a week ahead of time.



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Please keep the operating-hours and event information on your website current. You wouldn't advertise an event in the newspaper after it was over, would you? So why do it on your website?

If you don't have a webmaster who can promptly do updates on an as-needed basis, then do them yourself. Your Web designer can design an easy-to-update page that only requires you to make text changes, not graphics or layout modifications -- and in a matter of minutes you can learn how to make those changes and upload them.

No Map or Driving Directions

Another interesting fact revealed in the TIA study is that the number one thing pleasure travelers look for online are maps and driving directions. And they get frustrated when they don't find them. Enough said.

Not Selling Memberships Online (or making them an afterthought in the online store offerings)

Sell me a membership *right now*, while I'm at your website and excited about it. And wow, if I purchase a membership *right now* I can actually use my member discount immediately? Well, then, I might as well visit your online store while I'm here . . .

Not Collecting E-mail Addresses

E-mailing newsletters, website updates or notices of upcoming events to your site visitors who've registered/subscribed to receive them is one of the least expensive and most important forms of marketing you can do. In fact, if truth be told, the ability to collect e-mail addresses -- which will then allow you, over time, to convert some of those website visitors into donors, members and volunteers -- is probably the most important reason of all for having a website in the first place.

Yet in a [study](#) of 900 nonprofit organizations done earlier this year, the Gilbert Center discovered that 64 percent of those surveyed don't collect e-mail addresses at their websites and 71 percent don't publish electronic newsletters.

In summing up the study findings, Michael Gilbert wrote:

"Despite the overwhelming role that email plays in the success of the online marketing efforts of the for profit sector, despite the importance of email to users of the Internet, nonprofits have not integrated email into their communication. . . Instead, nonprofits have fallen prey to the lure of the stand alone web site. Over 80 percent of our respondents had websites, but nearly 80 percent did not have an email strategy, even as an afterthought."

Asking for Too Much Information

Just as bad as not asking for any information is asking for too much. If you want people to feel comfortable about signing up to be on your e-mail list, ask only for their e-mail address (and perhaps their name). Asking for any more than that scares visitors off and discourages them from subscribing. If you want to use your site to collect demographic information, great. But provide a completely separate form for that somewhere else on your site.

For links to other articles and resources on website marketing and design, visit the [E-Marketing](#) and [Website Development](#) pages of the Museum Marketing Tips Links Library.

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Katherine Khalife is a writer and consultant specializing in museum and Internet marketing, customer service and heritage cultural tourism. See the [Services](#) section for information about her workshops and other services, or e-mail her at kkhalife@museummarketingtips.com

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