

Making an Awesome Website Homepage

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You have only a few seconds to make a first, only and lasting impression when it comes to your website. Why is this important? With almost everyone using Google instead of phone books and newspapers to find businesses, your website is what most people are likely to see first.

Websites actually do have a “personality,” and communicate something about you, creating first impressions every day with your viewers. So, take a quick look right now and ask yourself, “*What does my website personality say about what my business is like?*”

Is your site clean? Organized? Convenient? Professionally polished? Visually appealing? Those are good traits people will automatically apply to your physical store, but the negative is true if your website looks dated, unprofessional, uncoordinated, unorganized, and inconvenient.

If you think you're creating a bad impression, that's OK—here are some really helpful tips to get more positive views from one of the most important areas on your website.

Your Home Page Layout

Your home page is where most people will land when searching for your business online.

First, if your home page has enough information that fits into one screen—without requiring the customer to scroll down to see everything—excellent! You are in great shape! Though, if your home page requires scrolling, it's time to make a change.

Why? When someone visits your store, not all of your merchandise is going to be in one corner--everything has a place. Think of your website the same way. Every department has a place, and certain items belong in each department according to a layout plan.

So, your home page is not a place for all the information of the entire store. Lay out the sections clearly and concisely with as little wording as possible. *Trust that most modern, experienced Internet users will find what they're looking for if you give them general directions.*

Ideally, your homepage should have three or four “main attractions.” We also refer to these as “call-to-action” buttons because they encourage customers to click on them for more information. Other than those things, perhaps add some text about who you are and what you do—but just a couple paragraphs, each being no more than three to four sentences long. Write plainly “from the heart,” and try to convey to customers **why** you do what you do. That's important to people, as well.

So, what sections should you put on your home page? Here is one group of suggestions:

- new inventory
- current inventory
- events

- specials

Or, maybe you'd like to go with these things:

- pre-loved inventory
- certified service department
- parts online
- finance options

Visitors will get a better experience with your home page if you follow these suggestions. Also remember—place everything on one screen which does not require scrolling.

Your Header

A header will “frame” the top of your website to make it visually appealing, and contain the basic details about your store and Internet presence. Your header, containing your logo, will usually be on each page of your website, and it can be used as a quick reference for customers.

Make sure your store logo is in a professional, high-quality digital format so the colors look crisp and the edges are sharp. If you do not have a good digital version of your logo, first ask your website provider if they can help— their fee is typically less than contracting a graphic designer. Your logo gets customers familiar with you, building rapport and recognition. If your logo looks inconsistent with the quality of the rest of your site, what would that say about your business?

Also on your header, be sure to include your address, social media links (like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube), and your phone number. These items add the important aspect of credibility to your business. And, customers always appreciate an easy-to-find phone number, so by placing it prominently on your header, you’re inviting their personal interaction.

Your Footer

Your website’s footer acts similar to your website’s header, but with a little less information. Try to have your footer contain a smaller version of your logo along with links to your hours of operation, a map and/or directions to your location, and a “contact us” or “email us” form. Some customers find sending a digital request more convenient than calling a phone number, so make it easy for them to do it.

Graphic Tips

In general, follow these practices and you'll be well on your way to creating better visual impressions, and it'll help people better absorb and organize your information:

- Pick two or three colors for the website. Be consistent in using them for backgrounds, effects, and other

content. Your website should not have a “rainbow” effect. In this case, less is more.

- Fonts matter! Choose only two fonts, and use them consistently. One font should be used for drawing special attention to things, and the other font should be used for informational content.

On your home page, you could design your main attraction links in a different font than your introductory paragraphs.

- Size matters! Choose two font sizes: one for your headers and titles, and one for your written content. As always, be consistent throughout the rest your site.
- Use visual spacing. Your store isn't tightly crowded, so why should your homepage be that way? Make sure you have room between your graphics, sections, and links so things don't look so jumbled together. It's easier on the eyes, too.

So, let's review what your home page should have:

- Four main attractions you want to emphasize to customers about your store.
- Optional: a couple short paragraphs about what you do and why, written from the heart.
- An attractive header with a clear logo, address, social media links, and prominent phone number.
- A polished footer containing links to your map/hours, and a “contact us” or “email us” form.
- Follow graphics guidelines: “three colors,” “two fonts,” “two font sizes,” and visual spacing.
- Contain it all within the one screen without requiring the customer to scroll down.

I hope you've learned a lot, and I also hope you make time to improve your home page and other things on your website. It's important to make a good first impression with your customers because it **BUILDS CREDIBILITY**, and it should say **I AM THE EXPERT! LOOK NO FURTHER!** Your website is your open store 24 x 7 x 365; it works for you when you are not there!

Stay tuned for next month's edition—**organizing your pages**.
