



Introduction

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Web sites are confusing. E-commerce is *more* confusing. I intend to provide you the very specific steps required to build a successful e-commerce web site. Most would agree that (Success = Profitable). I will share what I learned while building thousands of web sites.

Background

I formed Magnus Software in 1995 specializing in POS (Point of sale) software for grocery store cash registers. We had just started developing dynamic, data driven web based applications. Technology that the average Joe had not heard of. A perfect opportunity.

I actually spent a couple years selling web sites door to door. The internet was so new -- 50% told me "*The internet is just a fad, it won't be around long.*". You can imagine how long ago that was! Half the business population were non-believers! I have sold and built web sites for a long time.

Magnus Software spent the end of the 1990's building 1-3 sites per month. The average ticket price of a web site back then was around \$16,000 each. We sold sites for as much as \$100,000 each and as low as \$3,000. Business was good. Most of our clients were larger companies with large budgets.

Nothing lasts forever -- as we hit the year 2000 and into 2001, around the "Dot Bomb" era, I found I couldn't give away a web site. Everyone was sick from losing enormous amounts of money in the "Dot Com" stock market investments. We had to come up with a plan.

Our plan was to package this "high end" data driven technology and make it affordable for the average small to medium business owner. We now have customers that range from the one person home based business to \$100 Million dollar corporations using this platform.

That product was named the "Website Forge". Website Forge grew into it's own company. www.websiteforge.com

Need

You Need:

- One or more *profitable* products.
- A "good" web site design. Not a "great" one. (I'll explain later)
- To replace your IT person without becoming an IT person.
- Make the search engines understand your business!
- To understand what does NOT help search engines understand your business!
- Security
- Patience.

Solution

A profitable product sounds like common sense. I have to tell you it's one of my most common conversations with

business owners. If you have a catalog of 100 products and your goal is to have people find you in Google -- make sure you are targeting search results that attract people to the items that make you the most money. You can still sell the other products, just make sure you prioritize the profitable ones. Remember (Success = Profit).

You need a "good" web design. Anyone telling you *"A great web design will make or break you.."* has never helped their customer become financially successful. Your design is a tool just like anything else.

Let's think about restaurant you recently visited for the first time. You walk in and look around. In under one second you have determined if this restaurant is clean and looks "nice". After that -- you sit down and look at the menu. Do they have what you want to eat?

I cannot illustrate this point any simpler. Most of you don't remember if the chairs were metal or wood. You don't remember what shade of yellow their sign is. You spent an entire second to make a YES/NO decision. Now it's all about the menu and how good the food tastes!

I'm not saying you shouldn't take pride in your web site design. I'm just saying that nobody cares what shade of grey is in your background. I have watched hundreds of projects delayed in the design phase because our customer obsessed about a color, a photo, or how many pixels wide a border is. If you want to build a web site for your own "vanity" then go for it! It has nothing to do with how much money you make. I'll prove it. Take a look at <http://www.craigslist.com> . It's got to be one of the ugliest web sites ever created. Yet, it is responsible for millions of dollars in sales.

Replace your IT person without becoming one! There are too many solutions out there that offer zero programming ways to manage your own web site. My most successful clients manage their entire web site on their own. You may be too busy to do it yourself -- that's OK. Your web site should still be easy to manage by your average employee. Your receptionist. Your shipping staff. Your sales staff. In most cases a dedicated IT person should not be required to run a successful e-commerce web site. And you should always know how your system works. You must know what to expect before expecting someone else to help you with your e-commerce web site.

Make the search engines understand your business! You can't wait or hope it will happen. You can't trick the search engines into understanding your business. You must use technology outlined by the search engines to your own advantage. Let me clarify a few terms for my next explanation.

The term **"Search Engine Friendly"** simply means -- Can a search engine visit your home page and successfully crawl from page to page until it has read every word and every product on your web site? It has nothing to do with the position of your search results.

The term **"Search Engine Optimized"** means your "Search Engine Friendly" web site has been edited following known rules and advice that should help you move to a better position in the search engine results. You must have a "Search Engine Friendly" e-commerce web site to optimize it -- making it "Search Engine Optimized". You cannot do one without the other.

A fast talking salesperson might speak as-if the two are the same. Make sure you ask for clarification when evaluating an e-commerce web site company.

Not all sites are "Search Engine Friendly". Because search engines like Google wanted to help people who had already built web sites "Google Sitemaps" was created.

"Google Sitemaps" was defined originally by Google to allow a programmer to build a special document that describes every page and product on your web site just in case your site was not "Search Engine Friendly". That specification continues to say that you should update this sitemap file every time you update your web site so that Google can always stay up to date with your pages and products!

This has become a standard for other search engines including Yahoo!. Using "Google Sitemap" technology on your web site is proven to make a difference in your search engine results!

Do not confuse this technical document with a page on your site named "Sitemap". They are not the same. Again carefully listen to what your salesperson is talking about. Very few e-commerce web design companies will educate you about this very important part of bringing customers to your web site.

Another important technology you must have to compete is "Google Base" (formerly known as "Froogle"). "Google Base" is similar to "Google Sitemaps" in that it is designed to assure your products are properly explained to a search engine. However this focuses specifically on your products. It is another feature you must insist is included in your e-commerce web site.

Finally, you just might need a search engine expert to give you some advice. Every successful e-commerce business

come to a point where they need some help understanding what's going on with their search results. Especially where you are trying to beat millions of competing web sites.

What DOES NOT help your search engine results? It is just as important to know what not to do when it comes to marketing your web site in the search engines.

Constant site submissions. One of the most misunderstood concepts. YES - Just about every low end e-commerce web site company says they will resubmit your site to all sorts of search engines every month. NO - It does not help you at all.

At first it might sound like you are getting some sort of valuable "extra service". You are not. You don't need it and you should be weary of a company makes this sound important.

Your site needs to be submitted only one time. Submit your site with one of the major search engines like Google or Yahoo! That's it! Any other search engine that matters WILL find your site.

Multiple domain names. Though it's true that you should select your domain name carefully, you can get into trouble if you purchase a bunch of domain names and simply point them to your e-commerce web site.

In fact, you might handicap your search results! There is a right way to take advantage of buying extra domain names. This requires some detailed understanding of search engines.

Security! Unfortunately most companies learn about security the hard way. Just when you start making some consistent sales. Just when you sit back and relax for just moment. It happens.

You wake up and your web site has been redesigned to display a Turkish hacker's gang sign! Don't laugh. I've seen it happen!

This next point is very important. You can design a site to perform a function OR you can design a site to perform a function securely. These are two very distinct methods of programming. You MUST always choose the secure method.

Think about buying an automatic garage door opener. You take for granted that if a child is in the doorway when the garage door closes, the safety feature will immediately stop the door and tell it to open back up. In fact, you can't purchase an automatic garage door opener that doesn't have this important safety feature.

If e-commerce web sites were garage door openers -- very few have the necessary security to protect you!

Why would you purchase a web site without the necessary security? You wouldn't. However, security is more difficult to understand in the e-commerce business. Everyone offers a "SSL Certificate" and a pretty lock on the browser to show your customers that your site is secure. Security is so much more than that!

How does anyone get away with selling insecure sites? The answer is easy -- those same sites generally never give you enough sales to become a target. If you can't be found on the web -- then you can't be a target. As soon as customers can find your web site -- you may become a target for hackers too.

Credit card security. PCI Compliance is a guideline revolving around the security of your customer's personal information and credit card details. Only consider e-commerce web site providers that discuss the importance of PCI Compliance with you.

As soon as you enable your web site to accept credit cards -- you are exposed to PCI Compliance audits by Visa, Mastercard, American Express, or whatever cards you decide to accept.

Failing a PCI Compliance audit can result in financial penalties and possibly termination of your account. Our clients had a huge surge in audits near the beginning of this year.

Choose a solution that is PCI Compliant and will stay compliant as the guidelines change.

Patience is last but not least on my list. I have real life customers running profitable e-commerce web sites. These customers all have a few things in common. First, they have everything I outlined above. Next, they hard every day on their e-commerce web site. Finally, they realize it takes time to become successful. If it didn't -- everyone would be millionaires!

Benefits

How do you take all of my advice so far and apply this to your own e-commerce web site?

Website Forge is my solution. Designed from years of experience and thousands of e-commerce web sites!

Web Site Design - You receive a custom design you will love by your dedicated project manager. We follow a revision system that allows us to provide you unlimited design revisions.

No IT person required - You can add UNLIMITED pages, images, links, audio, video, and products from any place at any time without special software or tools. Manage orders and newsletters easily. We provide FREE training classes each week that you can attend as often as you wish. UNLIMITED support is also included.

You can also visit our customer forum where our customers interact and help each other. No other e-commerce web design company has such open communication between you and other Website Forge clients.

Search Engine Technology - Website Forge is engineered so that search engines can crawl every page and product. **Google Sitemaps** and **Google Base** are built in and require no additional charges.

Search Engine Advice - Every Website Forge customer receives a FREE consultation with our search engine expert and includes initial optimization of your web site. Our expert will also configure your **Google Sitemaps** and show you how to use Google Base.

Security - Website Forge has passed dozens of PCI Compliance Audits. Our source code is not "open source" so hackers are not able to "reverse engineer" our code to hack your site. We also actively scan for hacking and abuse attempts. Of course the SSL EV Certificate is included free of charge. We constantly keep up with current security threats and apply updates for FREE.

Other Benefits:

- **Free upgrades** - Website Forge upgrades and adds features all year long with no extra charge to you
- **Inventory Management** - Manage inventory and reorder quantities in real-time
- **Quickbooks POS Connectivity** - If you have a retail store, you can sync your customers, sales, and inventory with your brick and mortar stores.
- **Virus Scanned Email** - All email boxes are scanned for viruses before they arrive to your computer
- **Spam Control** - Built in anti-spam filters
- **Web Mail** - Web Mail for checking mail on the run
- **Enterprise Level Hosting** - Every Website Forge site is hosted on 8 individual servers that intelligently send your visitors to the least busy server to keep your site online without interruption. If a server fails -- your site will continue to operate.