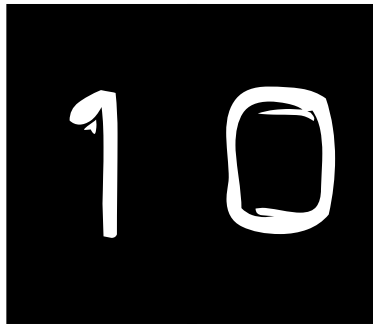# 10

Rookie Home Page Mistakes

How I Made Them
&
What You Can Avoid

10

Rookie Home Page Mistakes

Web pages for your consulting — or traditional — business aren't as complex as web designers have led you to believe. Good ones fulfill just three basic goals:

- They serve as a central point for information about what you sell.
- They showcase why you're the best source of that product.
- They provide a simple way for prospective customers to contact you.

That's all. Bells and whistles are nice, but these three goals are all you need worry about at first. With these in place, even a simple site will bring a stream of contacts and leads. Without them, the most complex and exciting site in the world does no good from a business standpoint.

For 90 percent of businesses, and likely 100 percent of solo consultants, this means a blog is the best tool for the job. They're simple. The software is free. They're formatted for easy, even automatic updates.

Even with a simple blog, there are traps that can cost you time and money if you develop in the wrong direction. In this report, I'll detail ten ways I did exactly that. I'll describe what I learned, how I fixed the problems, and what you can do to avoid those rookie errors.

Fixing these mistakes made me money as a freelance writer. I only wish I'd fixed them sooner.

1 Not Emphasizing Contact Info

Your site exists to connect you with potential clients. Not to provide entertaining reading, or to share adorable pictures of your children and cats.

It's a marketing truism that until you ask for money, you're just having a conversation. Until potential clients can easily contact you, your blog is just an amateur's website.

Put your contact information on every page. Every. Single. Page.

MY MISTAKES

1st Try
Email and phone number at the bottom of the "About" page, and on my downloadable resume. That's a minimum of two clicks and a scrolldown to even *find* my contact info. Talk about rookie mistakes.

2nd Try
Moved phone number and email to the header. It made things easier to find, but people still had to c/p the information to use it.

3rd Try
Header remains the same, but I've added a "Contact Me" button in the top right corner for each page. How to reach me is now in front-of-mind awareness for every visitor.

TO-DO LIST

☐ Get your business a dedicated email address

☐ Decide whether or not to publish your phone number on the web

☐ Create a graphic with your email, phone and the words "contact me"

☐ Place that graphic on each page of your website

2 Too Many Choices/ Too Busy

People don't read web pages. They scan them, looking for the parts they find most useful and interesting.

Your site should guide a reader's eyes to the things they're looking for. Even if they don't know exactly what that is. *Especially* when they don't know exactly what they seek.

If you give too many choices, new viewers are likely to choose going someplace else.

MY MISTAKES

1st Try   I got carried away with sidebars. A search bar, tag cloud, category list and three ads cluttered up my screen. I even had a quote of the day that I failed to update. All manner of distractions and excursions.

2nd Try   I overcorrected here, eliminating all my sidebars except for a single search field. That little tag in the corner was out of proportion with the text in my main columns — annoying and distracting.

3rd Try   A few simple items in the sidebar: My big "Contact Me" button, a subscribe field, an ad for one of my books, and a list of blog categories. They're simple and clean, don't distract from the main column, and run long enough to maintain a visual balance.

TO-DO LIST

☐ Identify three to five vital elements for each page of your site

☐ Ruthlessly eradicate everything else

☐ Consider rotating through elements with a monthly update

3 Too Much Text

"People swim in print, but they surf on the web." — *Michael Phelps*

You should never have a wall of text anywhere on your blog. People read web pages in chunks of information, not the long paragraphs your high school composition teacher required.

Use subheads, bullet points, white space and images to make your site easy to read.

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MY MISTAKES

TO-DO LIST

☐ Keep your existing content, even if it's full of text walls.

☐ Use a bullet list in your next post.

☐ Use subheads in the post after that.

☐ Practice writing short paragraphs separated by white space in the next.

☐ Rotate through steps two three and four until you're comfortable with blogging style.

1st Try — I wrote for my high school teachers: 500 to 600 word walls of text in every post. No photos. No subheads. No bullet lists. It looked and read like magazine articles — which surfers don't read.

2nd Try — I shifted to "standard blog" style for this version, but hit a snag. The template I use didn't support bullet points. Months of seeking a solution never found one, but eventually an update enabled bullets. Lucky break.

3rd Try — I make sure all of my posts guide the surfing eye in chunks of info using all the best blog practices. It's different from what I was taught, but easier in a way.
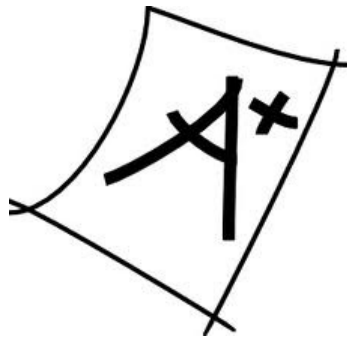
4 No Testimonials

What sounds better?

- "I'm a professional freelancer who delivers product on time to your specifications."
- "Johnny Writer is a true professional. He delivers product on time to my specifications."

Testimonials let you shamelessly brag while remaining professional and humble. They are a form of "social proof" — one of the most powerful currencies of the web.

MY MISTAKES

1st Try I had no testimonials. Partly because I had none. Partly because I hadn't thought to.

2nd Try Added testimonials to my portfolio page, interspersing quotes between work samples. I used comments made to me by editors I'd worked with.

3rd Try I capitalized on the social proof aspect of testimonials by setting up a dedicated page with quotes and photos of former clients. Instead of using editorial comments, I asked some of my favorites for kind words — and they delivered better than I could have hoped.

TO-DO LIST

☐ Email three to six former clients or teachers for blurbs. Ask for a photo, too.

☐ Dedicate a page on your website for testimonials..

☐ Add the blurbs and photos to your page. This is easy with blog software, or send the files to your web person.

APPROVED

Great Job!

5 Lacking Photos

They won't hire until they see the whites of your eyes.

This isn't the 1990s when every image took minutes to load. People *like* pictures. They capture the eyes, break up text walls and guide readers to the most important parts of your page.

Potential clients like to see that you understand the value of photos, and know how to properly use them.

MY MISTAKES

1st Try Just one image: the banner. And that wasn't really even a photo.

2nd Try Added miniature covers for links to my print work and a photo cluster (the one in the corner here) to my "About" page.

3rd Try Added photos of clients who gave blurbs. I also gathered a collection of photos to use in my blog posts...all properly credited to show that I know how to do that right.

TO-DO LIST

☐ Gather a half-dozen of the best photos in your personal collection. Keep them professional, but select those that show who you are.

☐ Edit them in Paint.net, Photoshop or a similar program to make them perfect for your page.

☐ Place them on static pages in your site.

☐ Get a collection of ten or twelve stock photos to include in blog posts that don't merit a unique image.

5 Weak "About" Page

Your "About" page will be the second-most visited place on your site, second only to the front page.

Potential customers will want to know a little about you. It gets past the "trust factor" of the anonymous Internet by putting a face to what your claiming.

Keep the pictures and comments on your site professional. This isn't the space for cute pics of your dog, or of yourself in the mirror, or your hilarious dance at your brother's bachelor party. Avoid comments about religion or politics. Stay professional, but interesting.

MY MISTAKES

1st Try — I had a single paragraph: my author bio for newspapers and guest blogs. No photos.

2nd Try — Expanded the page to three paragraphs and added a poor-quality photo of myself on vacation in Alaska (I was pushing travel writing at the time).

3rd Try — Added a cluster of high-quality photos showing me, my family and my hobbies. The text morphed into a snapshot of my personal interests and history, framed in the context of how those experiences make me a good writer.

TO-DO LIST

☐ Get a professional to take a head shot of you, or take a few dozen shots with your best digital camera. One of those will turn out perfect.

☐ Read 12 to 20 "About" pages on sites you like. Note what makes them work.

☐ Write three paragraphs about what makes you an excellent writer. Do one on your history, one on your writing and one on your interests — unless you have a different format you like better.

7 Static Content

There are two kinds of content on the web: *static* **and** *dynamic.*

- *Static Content* never changes.
- *Dynamic Content* updates regularly.

- *Static Content* does nothing to motivate return visits.
- *Dynamic Content* encourages people to come back and see what's new.

- *Static Content* fails to engage search engines.
- *Dynamic Content* engages engines by updating regularly.

Static content is the realm of people who want a website, but don't understand the web. Professionals who "get" new media maintain dynamic websites.

TO-DO LIST

☐ Set a calendar reminder to tell you when you need to update your content.

☐ Post regularly to your blog, two or three times per week at a minimum.

☐ Respond to every comment on your pages, with content that encourages a response to your response.

MY MISTAKES

1st Try I did okay on this from the get go, since this is something I understood early on. I updated my blog five times each week. The other pages remained static...in some cases even when out of date.

2nd Try I didn't really change this on the second iteration. It was one of the few things I did right, and I focused on other improvements.

3rd Try I increased how frequently pages updated by encouraging comments — causing pages that received comments to update automatically. I also make a change or two to my other pages each month...just to keep things fresh.

8 No Comments

Blogs are about sharing and community, and about how well you engage your readers.

Comments improve the reader experience, and show potential clients that you can inspire an audience to get involved. Getting comments is tough at first, but can accumulate pretty quickly once you get the ball rolling.

MY MISTAKES

1st Try I just shot my copy out into the void. A single comment per week would get me five kinds of excited. Some of my favorite colleagues are people I met via comments from this period.

2nd Try My first push for comments was to reach out to those colleagues, family, friends and similar contacts. I asked them to start an occasional conversation. I also hosted a few contests where participants would place their entries in the comments section.

3rd Try This is still something I'm working on: I don't have nearly as many comments as I'd like. I'm putting together a "street team" of people who will comment on my blog, Facebook page and through Twitter. Definitely a work in progress.

TO-DO LIST

☐ Find six friends who will give you five or ten minutes three times a week, commenting on your updates.

☐ Comment on every comment made on your blog. Start conversations and friendly arguments.

☐ Hold a contest, offering a small prize (even just "bragging rights) with entries going in the comments on the announcing blog post.

Comments

Logged in as Pete Bratach   Log Out

Add a comment....

Post   ☑ Post comment to my Facebook profile

Laura González-Estéfani Ramiro at 4:36pm
Cool
Message

Ronnie Cheng at 10:54am
Awesome
Message

9 Ignoring Keywords and Metacontent

This is Search Engine Optimization 101, but it's surprising how many people miss it.

Readers won't see this, but they won't see anything else on your page without it. Having keywords in your copy and the metacomments of your web code helps search engines bring your page to the attention of people who search for what you write about.

Research and choose your keywords carefully. "Freelance writer" might be a good description of what you do, but everybody uses it and competition is fierce. You'll get better results with a more specific string like "freelance travel writer" or "Topeka freelance writer."
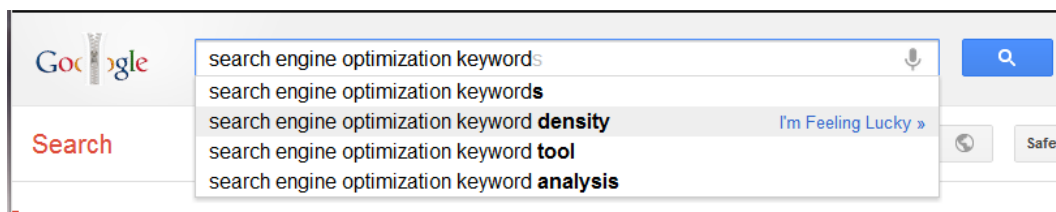
MY MISTAKES

1st Try It's embarrassing. I advise some clients on exactly this, but did none of it on my own page.

2nd Try I did research, choosing six keywords I wanted to push heavily. I pumped my tags and posts with these — not enough to interrupt the flow of text, but enough to skew results.

3rd Try You can now find keywords in invisible parts of my blog, like photo titles and some metacomments in the code itself. You wont' see it, but Google does.

TO-DO LIST

☐ Research keywords for your profession, especially services you want to highlight.

☐ Use one to three keywords naturally on each page.

☐ Research and understand metacomments — it's too complex for a simple bullet point.

☐ Apply that research to your content.

10 Lacking Internal Links

Casinos do this. You should, too.

Their architecture is designed to make it hard to leave. You head for the exit, and the route runs you past distractions and attractions until you sit down for just "one more game."

If you've ever lost an evening to Wikipedia, you understand the power of internal links to do exactly this. It keeps readers on your site, and figures in on search engine results.

MY MISTAKES

1st Try — I hadn't even thought of this strategy, and didn't do it — though I did include some external links from time to time.

2nd Try — Added internal links when appropriate. If I posted on a topic I'd covered before, I'd link to at least one of the previous posts. I did a few series, complete with cross-linking.

3rd Try — I put one to three internal links in every post. I work so they feel natural, but I have enough content on my blog that it's usually easy to do.

TO-DO LIST

☐ Index your pages and posts, either by hand or using a web widget.

☐ List your ten best pieces of content and link back to them often.

☐ Bookmark your six best posts, and link back to them frequently.