

# Marketing Instincts

Hugh Latif & Associates

[hughlatif.com](http://hughlatif.com)

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Management Consultants and Corporate Governance

## WEBSITE

Your website: *An important tool in your marketing tool box*

Few years back, people used to open the Yellow Pages to find a restaurant, a doctor, an attorney or a bakery. Today they go to a search engine like Google to find products and services they need. Once they find what they are searching for, they open any specific business' website to get more information: prices, menus, special offers, look for their contact information, their philosophy and services.

They don't even need to have a computer or a PC. They can do all this from the convenience of their smart phone in real time. They look at reviews by other customers and read what other people have said about the business or enterprise they have interest in. I have frequently changed my mind about a restaurant based on the feedback that is readily available on the Internet. Recent research indicates that 90% of business to business (B2B) purchases decision starts with a search engine operation and 80% of people search local business online.

### **All businesses need a professional website with a "WOW"**

With this in mind, there is no doubt that any and all businesses should have a website and not just any website, but a professional one that can attract new and repeat customers. No website would be similar to a business that has no sign on its door. Besides, why would you not have a website that is open 24/7 for you and can keep prospects, customers, suppliers, employees and all your business associates up to date on your company? Remember that it is not that your business needs a website, as much as it is your customers and prospects that expect your company to have one.

Your website is actually one of the best and most efficient marketing tools available to "WOW" your prospects and customers before they even meet you or talk with you. For many businesses, customers and prospects can be located half way around the world and they may have a genuine interest for your product or service. Your target market does not have to be limited by geography as in local, provincial, regional or national but, can be international. This may not apply to all businesses, but you will be surprised with how the Internet has taken companies from the local scene to the global market almost overnight.

### **What an opportunity**

In addition to this, websites tend, to a large extent, level the playing field for large and small companies. How is that you ask?

Well, if I visit the IBM website I will be seeing it on the small screen of my smart phone just as I can see the website of [www.hughlatif.com](http://www.hughlatif.com). If I visit the McKinsey & Company website from my laptop, I will see it on the same 17 inch screen monitor that I use to see [www.hughlatif.com](http://www.hughlatif.com)! While McKinsey & Company is huge in size by comparison to Hugh Latif & Associates, when it comes to visiting our respective websites, we both are limited by the same equipment and use fundamentally the same technology. Furthermore, the Google

search engine will find both of our websites with the same speed. Actually, considering the different sizes of the two management consulting practices, proportionally, Google has better coverage of Hugh Latif & Associates (on 3 pages) than McKinsey's because McKinsey has so many competitors fighting for space and ads on the Google search result page! Unbelievable, but true.

## Website don'ts

Watch out though, because a poorly designed website or an unattractive non-professional website can actually cause more damage than good. Frequently, I visit websites and see that the information has not been updated for several years. What does this say to your customers and prospects or potential employees that are visiting your website?

What about a website that has empty pages or poor images and photos? What about websites with information that has been cramped into the page, text that is hard to see and to read, no titles and are user unfriendly?

These are counter-productive websites and can cause important business to flee away from you. You must have heard that you don't have a second chance at making a positive impression. It is the same for a website visit. Unfortunately, you don't get a second chance and the homepage may invite the visitor to stay longer and visit more of your website or exit quickly. Similarly, if you walk down main street, some store windows are inviting and entice you to walk in and some make you walk on by faster. Websites, to a large extent are the same.

## Website do's

With some of the website don'ts out of the way, here is a list of the website do's. They are shown in random order and I believe all are important, so don't skip any points:

- Let's start with your **domain name**. It is preferable that your domain name be simple and no more than 14 letters. It should also be free of commas, dots and hyphens. Simple, easy and short is best.
- Make sure you **register your domain name** with a reputable company and have a bring-forward file to remind you of its expiry date. Website domain name pirates have been known to blackmail you for your own website name if the domain name expires without prior renewal.
- Make sure you **host** your website with a reputable Internet hosting company that will have your website up 99% of the time and that your website loads quickly.
- You know your customers and prospects well so make sure that your website would appeal to **your audience** in look, feel, content, graphics etc. If your main audience is mainly middle-age professionals, use a conservative relatively large font for easy reading and conservative colors. If your audience is mainly teenagers, use a funkier font with more jazzy colors. Adapt to your audience.
- Make sure that your website can also be seen by **mobile devices** as in smart phones and tablets etc.
- The **look and feel** of your website should be a continuation of your original sales and marketing material with the same colors, same logos, same fonts etc. In this way there is harmony and continuity with your marketing material.
- Pay particular importance and care to the **content** of your website and get professional help not just for the typos and excellent grammar but, for the style and wording used. Remember to include the

same words used for search criteria into your website pages (SEO) and especially the home page or landing page which is customarily the first page of a visit.

- Choose a **graphic designer** that understands your business and understands what you expect from your website. You are not competing for the website design award of the year. Clear design, a fresh look and easy read is usually best.
- Use headings to **organize** your page content and stay away from cramped information on a page. Focus on the most important information first, then add the supporting details and finally fill it in with more useful information. Keep superfluous information out – less is more. Use the “read more” button to keep pages clear and easy to read and when appropriate use bulleted lists.
- **Hyperlinked text** makes for a user friendly website.
- Use professional **photos and videos**. No amateur photos and videos and don't stretch professional photos either. If using videos, short videos of 2-3 minutes maximum are best. If videos are used, they must load fast. If loading takes more than a minute, 80% of the people will exit.
- Optimize performance with **search engines** by including the right search engine words in your website content (SEO). Give search engines what they are looking for.
- Have your **company name, full address and phone number** on the footer of all pages for easy reference.
- Use of **call to action buttons** when appropriate or opt-in list building forms.
- For **money matters** such as shopping carts and wish list, use ready-made solutions provided by well-known and reputable companies. No need to re-invent the wheel again unless you have a unique product that requires a customized e-commerce shopping cart but, that is often far more expensive and time-consuming.
- If you provide a **search button**, make sure you test it with your website content and have a friendly phrase when the search is negative.
- Always have a **thank you phrase** when visitors send you a message or access some content in a dynamic interactive manner so they know that their request or message went through.
- Have your **main menu** of buttons clear and visible preferably up on the home page for easy access. Repeat the menu, if need be, in smaller font in the footer of the website.
- If you use a **drop down menu**, make sure it is user friendly and works with all the computer mouse and other accessories.
- If you have documents to give away, have them in **PDF** format so that if your visitor prints them, they will print perfectly.
- Have the **CONTACT** button clearly shown at the top and/or at the footer again. Don't hide it in the corporate page. You want to make it easy for visitors to contact you. If computer generated traffic bothers you, that's OK; that's the price you pay for the good traffic.
- Have a separate page for **employment and careers** and have the option of potential applicants to be able to send you their resume/CV.

- Make sure you include a page with a long list of **testimonials**. Prospects do read them and make sure they are authentic testimonials and comments.
- If you offer **guarantees and/or warranties**, make sure it's clear and evident.
- If your company is a **member or affiliated with associations** and trade organizations, make sure you list these and have their logo or name hyperlinked for easy and friendly linkage.
- If your business is international, have a **translated version** available in the languages that are needed.
- If you have a **1-800 telephone number**, include it and show the hours of service and the zones covered. If you do not have an international 1-800 number, show a separate number for international phone inquiries. If you do, make sure the employees that respond to the telephone call can speak several of the major languages that covers the majority of your demo target.
- In your **corporate profile** show your values, vision and mission if appropriate. If you have a code of ethics, publish it.
- If your business has been around for some time, show your starting date and advertize that you are a **well-established business**.
- Never lie about your size. Make sure all information on your website is **factual and correct**.
- If you can show **case studies** and actual examples of how your product or service is, include them in a summary format and show BEFORE and AFTER.
- If you operate your business from home, make sure you have a **mailing address**, preferably a physical address. You can use a virtual office address for a very low monthly charge. It is professional and adds to the seriousness of your enterprise.
- Don't use your personal phone. Have a business telephone number and make sure you have a **professional answering service** Monday to Friday 9-5. It is a small monthly investment for a professional image.
- If you have one, set up your resource center with valuable articles and technical information. If you have media or are in the news page, share it and have a section that highlights important milestones.
- If a **Frequently Asked Questions** section applies to your business. Have a FAQ page with easy access and a friendly look.
- If your business or you have **YOUTUBE** videos or other **social media** content, provide friendly updated links.

That may be a long list, but I trust that all the points were important, practical and will effectively assist you with bringing your best website to fruition.

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