

The Importance of Being...Big?

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While flitting around in a set of Google search results recently, I came upon a blog post from a small web design/marketing firm that simultaneously cracked me up and made me want to hit things. The article was titled Your Small Business Website Is More Important Than Starbucks' Website. There's so much that's wrong just within that title, but I'm not going to get into that. It was the opening sentence that really got my laughter started…

“Think about it…does Starbucks really need to be worried about their website?”

The author went on to answer their own question with a big fat no, postulating that for a large corporation like Starbucks the website is really just “a bonus for a large existing customer base.”

First off, I'm not even sure what that's supposed to mean. A bonus? What kind of bonus is a web site? A web site is a tool—marketing, transactional, or informational. Those things aren't “bonus” items, they're essentials.

Now, will a crappy web site prevent people from going to a store and buying their morning latte? Probably not. But, will a crappy web site prevent people from learning about why they might want to make Starbucks their morning latte of choice? Absolutely. Will it hinder the ability of Starbucks to spread their brand and offer their customers more ways to experience the company beyond just that morning latte? You bet your ass it will. Will it prevent Starbucks from adequately serving their existing customer base? Fuck yeah.

I'm not saying that small businesses shouldn't be concerned about their web presence. They absolutely should. But large companies have to be (and in many cases are) just as concerned over their corporate web presence. So why did this make me want to hit things? Because, I can't even imagine how out of touch with the realities of digital marketing someone would have to be to assert anything different. I know that the author is just trying to get some small business owner to hand over a check for a web site, but come on!

In fact, corporate web presences need tender loving care for many of the same reasons that the author of that article lists for small businesses. Let's talk advertising, and how quickly ad budgets can be eaten up. The example used above was \$400 for a 2"x2" ad block in a local newspaper. So, yes, we can see pretty easily how that's going to quickly impact the bottom line for most small business owners.

But, what happens when you start pushing those numbers out for a very large company with worldwide branding efforts? Now you're not just dealing with local newspapers, but national print publications, multiple online media channels, radio spots, and television air time. Ever priced a 30-second spot on NBC during Saturday Night Live on the weekend before a presidential election? Starbucks could tell you a few things about that.

Notice I didn't just say that the corporate web site needed extra-special tender loving care. I said web presence. Because it's not just about a single web site. It's about many sites, not all of them under the control of that one large company. We now have places like YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and GetSatisfaction to contend with as avenues where customers are expecting interaction with their companies of choice. It's a big, bad, ever-changing digital world out there and large companies generally have the hardest time adapting and managing those changes. If you think that all of that can happen (in a smart way) without any attention to planning or strategic thinking, you're dead wrong.

And why did it make me laugh so hard I nearly pissed myself? Well, if you ever happen to be in Seattle, feel free to hit me up for beer and stories. I'll buy the first round. ;-)