Web of Intrigue

To succeed, business sites must cater to mobile users, feature interesting content

For a business just having a website doesn’t cut it anymore. To drive more traffic to your site and ensure your business ranks ahead of the rest, businesses must update the content on their sites regularly and integrate them with social networking websites.

In addition, with the rapidly increasing number of mobile devices, businesses need to make sure their websites are just as effective on a 4-inch handheld screen as on a 20-inch computer monitor.

Building a mobile site

Butler County Community College has experienced a steady climb in mobile website users during the past two years. Dennis Birkes, Web manager, said in November 2008, only about 60 hits to BC3’s website were from mobile devices. In November 2010, that number jumped to just over 1,000. In November 2011, that number jumped again to almost 2,000, which was out of 13,000 total hits.

Birkes expects that number to continue to rise significantly, even as soon as this month because of the popularity of mobile devices this past holiday season.

More importantly, Birkes said when the college further analyzed the Web statistics, the data indicated visitors using mobile devices were ending their sessions sooner.

He attributed this, in part, to the way the site looks on a smartphone. Because the home page that had been appearing on a handheld device the same way it appeared on a desktop or laptop computer, the user had no option to view the site on a larger screen. The text and graphic elements on the page were truncated, and the user had no option to read or navigate menus.

Scott Changnon, director of communications and marketing, said when a business is not mobile-ready, the user ultimately leaves. To make sure mobile users have a positive experience, Changnon said the college has been developing a mobile site for a little more than a year and plans to launch it this month.

Birkes noted mobile sites are designed to work better on mobile devices by featuring larger text and menu buttons.

After mobile sites are developed, they are usually by redesigning the operating system of the device in use. Birkes said if a user goes to BC3’s website, the regular site will load. If a smartphone user goes to BC3’s website, the mobile site will load.

For an institution like BC3 with a more than 5,000-page website, parsing down that content for a mobile site can be a challenge.

You have to structure your information differently,” Birkes said.

Birkes, Changnon and Web editor Kayla Mirabella and many others have been brainstorming to get the necessary information on the mobile site.

Changnon said a major focus in recruiting, and in the future, students will be able to apply through a mobile device. However, since many students and faculty use mobile devices, the college put an emphasis on making sure information related to day-to-day activities, such as campus events and lunch menus, is included.

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Devices are essential tools keeping businesses on the go

Mobile devices such as smartphones and tablet computers are good for more than just checking e-mail on the go, and they certainly aren’t just gimmicky tech gadgets to play games on.

Mobile devices are full-fledged business tools that can contribute to success and help attract business.

More than one-third of all adults in the United States own a smartphone, according to a Pew Internet Report survey conducted in May. Plus, 85 percent of those with a college degree and nearly 60 percent of adults living in a household earns an income of $75,000 or more own a smartphone, according to the report.

These figures do not even account for tablet computer use.

Plus, with service providers offering high-speed Internet connections to mobile users, the World Wide Web can be at a business person’s fingertips at all times.

How can potential customers find businesses on the go? Their mobile devices.

How can businesses stay on top of all of their appointments while having access to their documents? Their mobile devices.

"It’s like having a Swiss Army knife in your pocket at all times," said Tom Graham, owner of Printers & Pixels in Butler.

Graham not only uses applications, or "apps," on his iPhone 4 to track business-related expenses and travel, but he also uses the high-definition camera on the phone to keep a valuable tool in capturing video in a pinch.

John Giles, president of DocCutting Edge Solutions and Future POS, which develop and distribute point-of-sale software for the hospitality and retail industries, said mobile devices have been part of the company’s market for at least the past six years.

Similar to the touch screen monitors Future POS distributes the company offers handheld devices that run the same interface and are a little larger than the average smartphone.

The handhelds enable wireless tableside ordering, either through a server or by the customer, and even can process credit card payments.

However, because the Android-based operating system market is so wide open, Giles said Cutting Edge Solutions has recently been designing software that can be used with existing mobile devices.

For example, leading the company’s point of sale software onto Android-based tablets turns the device into a mobile terminal.

The result is a cheaper, but less rugged, alternative to Future POS’ handhelds that can be paired up with Bluetooth magnetic stripe readers for credit card transactions and a belt-mounted printer for receipts.

Giles said using mobile devices for checkouts has the potential to be more secure for both the customer and the business because the data is encrypted and because the server programs customer’s card at the table, reducing the likelihood credit card data is stolen.

Also, Giles has integrated his company’s software to work with the Tab CPAD mobile application, which allows users to scan and pay for their restaurant tab from anywhere at any time.

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