It's not just a website; it's a digital employee.^{TM}
Website Design
Article by Michele Jennings, Netmajic, Inc.

As with all employees, there is a job description, training, constant communication of current company products, services, and how to treat customers, client feedback, performance evaluation, and the expected return on investment. The only difference is the digital employee works all year, 7 days a week, 24 hours a day, does exactly what you tell it, and never calls in sick.

- o **Do you wish your company's website was returning on your investment?**
- o **What does a company need to do?**
- o **How much does it cost?**
- o **How long does it take?**
- o **Should a website be part of your company marketing campaign?**

Let's get this last question out of the way right up front. Does my company need a website? Absolutely YES! Welcome to the 21st century.

The Big Scheme of Things

In the big scheme of running a company, the digital employee, i.e. website, is in the marketing department. This is where the company's brand responsibility resides. Brand is defined and re-enforced every time your company interacts with a person. The person may be a customer, investor, vendor, employee, employee's family member, competitor, or the general public. When a company interacts with a person through their website, it is your "digital brand". Successfully building a consistent brand requires integration of the company's operations, i.e. how a company finds, serves and satisfies customers, and the company's marketing, i.e. how a company manages its media and messages in the competitive and confusing marketplace or marketspace. Marketing sets the brand promise through the message. Operations makes good on the promise with every interaction. Consistent brand integration of operations and marketing spells success.

How Does a Person "Interact" with a Website?

When a person visits your website they read the content and select more content through the navigation links. The combination of content and navigation is your "digital brand". How well the content and navigation describes your company and how easy your website is to navigate to find content is how "good" your company is at keeping its "brand promise" of value and service".

Wow, and you thought it was just a website!
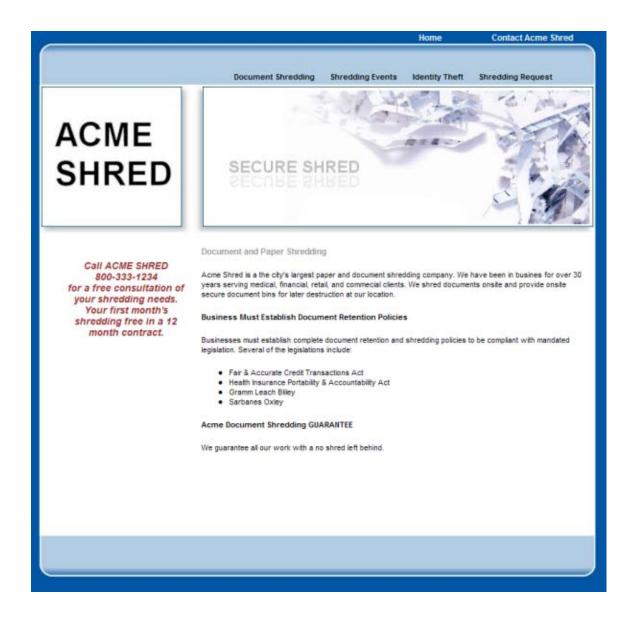
Website Design Preparation

Enough of the theory, let's move on to actually designing a website. One that delivers the brand promise of value and service, is found in the search engines, and contributes to the bottom line.

This article is not going to teach you how to actually write the code or make the graphics to make a website. It is going to help you decide what content should be in your website and how to structure your website.

The website canvas is 800 pixels wide and about 600 pixels long. Oops sorry techie talk. OK that would translate to about 8" wide by 6" long on a piece of paper. The design needs to give space for these things;

1. Company logo and tag line
2. Navigation
3. Content
4. Call to action

The company logo and tag line is usually in the top 1 – 3 inches. The navigation resides anywhere in the top 3 inches. The content is below the navigation. The call to action is bold and enticing and above 4". A sample layout is shown.

ACME SHRED is a document shredding company. Everything about this company is fictitious. No paper was harmed in the design of this sample website. Sorry, couldn't resist. View this website online, www.netmajic.com/acmeshred .

The company logo, tagline and eye-catching graphic are mid-top. In website design there is a fold line like in a newspaper. All the catchy news must be above the fold line when placed on a news stand. In a website many people have their computer screen set to 640 x 480 pixels, or they may have many toolbars from search engines and then the browser itself has top buttons and tabs. All this takes valuable real estate from the website. Check out your own computer screen and your browser. How many inches down does your browser take space before the actual website begins. On a website the fold line is about 400 pixels down or about 4 inches. It this case just below the red Call to Action
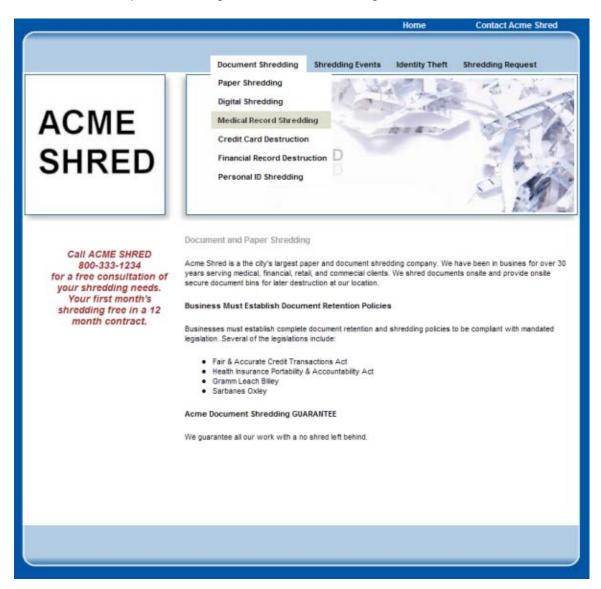
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and the header "Business Must Establish …". Now you've got the layout. Let's move on to the very important navigation.

Navigation must be the same on every page of your website. The same place, the same links, the same brand. Consistency is king. The navigation also must use real words that describe your business. Navigation using the words Products, Services, Links, About Us and Contact Us hasn't described your business to the visitor. ACME SHRED is in the business of Document Shredding, does Shredding Events, knows about Identity Theft, and welcomes your Shredding Request. And please contact Acme Shred because that is our name, we would like you to remember it, and we don't use any other name.

ACME SHRED also recognizes it services many vertical business lines, so check out its drop down navigation in this next image.

Each of the drop down navigation links go to a page that discusses the specific needs of that vertical industry, showing ACME SHRED as the document shredding expert in each vertical area. Note the number of times the navigation says paper or shredding or document or the hot topic identity theft. Right on the home page and every page for that matter the visitor knows where to navigate to find the answer to their burning question.

In preparation of a website design organize your content by the most important product or service groups your company performs. In this case Document Shredding. This will be your top level navigation. Under each top level navigation list specific pages to specific customer groups, types of document shredding, why shred, or how shredding is accomplished. The keywords that people search to find your company in the search engines or the previously used yellow pages are good terms for your navigation. In ACME SHRED's case Shredding Events are popular events around town and they have attained many new clients through these sponsored events. Therefore Shredding Events receives top level navigation status with a drop down for each date and place. Each data and place navigation link is a page with a printable flyer with dates, times, place, and a map, plus, of course, sponsorship recognition for ACME SHRED and other sponsors. Suitable for display around town or sending in an e-newsletter.

The content on the page should use industry specific words such as document, shredding, paper, and other industry specific words. The content should be minimal with the empty words, we are the best, quality service is our motto, and other adjectives that could describe any business. Write down every keyword used to describe your industry and your business and use those words in the sentences and in your navigation.

The call to action is very important. The call to action gives the new visitor something they value, in return you receive sufficient information to grow a lasting relationship. In order of importance you would like to receive:
1. An order
2. A face to face meeting with a potential new client
3. Contact information of a potentially interested company

What you give in value comes from all those calls you receive into your company. What do people talk about first, such as identity theft, credit card issues, or compliance with legislation. Be specific, each month may be a specific audit to a legislation, tickets to a seminar with great breakfast muffins or free month shred. Each page can have it's on specific call to action. Building lasting relationships is the key to a good employee, digital or analog.

A word to the wise – check your website, do all the navigation links work, are all the images showing, are there typos on the website. If your company is

attentive to detail on their own website, your company be this attentive to their client's work.

How much does a new website design cost?

A new website or redesign of an existing website can be free from the neighborhood kid to $100,000's for a New York City web designer. Your company can have an analog employee build the website using free online web builder tools at any of the domain registrars or search engines.

There are also template websites where you pick a template design and color. Your analog employee or you can pay a "non-web designer" to input your content to generic navigation such as products and services and contact us. There is little you can do to customize these websites. These websites also will be hard pressed to be found in the search engines because of the lack of control of the underlying code and generic web design. These templates sites go from $500 to $1000's depending on the seller.

Custom website design by a company experienced in marketing on the web and adept at designing digital employees to contribute to the bottom line will be very dependent on the web design company. Prices can range between $3,000 - $10,000 for a 10 page local city or state-wide recognized website. Websites for nationally recognized brands can be in the $100,000's and will have 100's of pages. How much your company can spend depends on your budget and how much new clients are worth. Once a website is designed, maintenance, i.e. adding new content for updates and marketing campaigns, may be 30% a year depending on the website.

How long does it take to make a new website?

A 10 page custom website can usually take 2 – 4 months depending on your company's ability to develop the content. Many times your company may need to define or refine a business plan prior to the website beginning. Although the website designer may help develop the content it takes time to iterate revisions. Typically the website design does not take as long as the content time frame.

Should you build your website yourself?

A custom website is like golf. Lots of people can play the game but to get it to the professional status takes experience. Building a simple website is simple. Building a professional website gets very complicated very fast.

Your time is better spent in your business. Hire a web designer.

Selecting a Website Design Company

Website design is a delicate balance of business profit goals, marketing strategy, being found in the search engines, and the visitor's experience.

Whether it's a new website, refreshing an existing website, optimizing your website for the search engines or maintaining the content on an existing website, your website requires work. Your company's brand is reflected in your website by the content and how easy your site is to navigate. Your website is your digital brand. Visitors should be able to find what they were looking for when they entered your website, find their way out, and find value in the journey to return.

A website design company should understand these concepts and help you navigate your way through doing business on the web.

Select your website design company carefully.

Netmajic

Netmajic is a technology company, celebrating 13 years in business. Netmajic, www.netmajic.com offers website design, search engine placement, and Internet marketing.