

Is Your Web Site Damaging Your Company Brand?

Is your web site running on executive autopilot, created during the excitement of the 1990s then left behind as executive attention focused elsewhere in the business? If so, it is time to decide what to do with the resources being expended to keep your web site alive.

While web sites are cheap compared to other channels and media, they are not free. The amount of money spent to keep them running is significant, ranging from tens of thousands of dollars annually for small sites, to hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars for larger sites. Would that money be better spent elsewhere in the business?

Maybe, but money is not the only consideration with a web site. Customers have direct interaction with web sites in ways they do not with broadcast and print media. According to research by BJ Fogg of Stanford University, people develop the same emotional reactions to interactive technologies that they do in their interactions with other people. This means there is a second risk from keeping a neglected web site, erosion of your corporate brand.

Let's face it. Brand is not logo recognition, even though that often is the metric used to gage the value of mass media advertising campaigns. Brand is the overall mental perception and emotions that people develop about your company and products. While traditional brand advertising can generate awareness and interest, once there is a direct interaction with the company or product, particularly a negative one, it quickly overrides the advertising perception.

Customers perceive interaction with your web site as a direct interaction with your company. If your web site is frustrating your customers and making them angry it is costing more than money; it is tarnishing your overall brand image. This is much worse than having an employee that is angering customers, because your web sites interacts with a much larger number of people than any single employee. Which brings us back to the title question: Given the expense *and* risk of a web site running on autopilot, should you just shut it down and not have a web site?

What would happen if you did? The executive team should ask this question, and should give it serious thought. Who would notice or miss your web site? Why? If the executive team decides the web site is worth keeping, it is time to take it off executive autopilot and address the value directly. This is done by insisting that web site objectives be developed, prioritized and aligned with the overall business objectives and that the results are audited and tracked.

If it is not worth this minimal level of executive investment, then you should shut down your web site, because the cost and risk to your company and brand are too great.

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