

Interactivity Weak Link for PR Agency Sites

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A recent academic study of public relations agency websites found that, while most are very strong in the areas of usefulness of information and ease of interface, there was a wide variation in both site stickiness and the level of return website visitors.

The study, which was conducted by John G. Wirtz, Ph.D., assistant professor, College of Communication, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and Prisca Ngondo, assistant professor, Department of Journalism and Public Relations, Chico State University, analyzed 102 websites of major U.S.-based public relations agencies.

Their conclusions suggest that some agency sites may lack the interactivity necessary to cultivate an online agency-client relationship.

Curious as to how PR agencies attract and keep clients via their websites, *PR News* called on one midsize and one boutique agency to find out.

At **Crossroads Public Relations**, an agency of seven people, its website, Crossroadspr.com, is a work in progress. In fact, the agency is launching a redesigned site later this month. Shawn Ramsey, Crossroads' founder and principal, says knowing who you're speaking to on a site—and what matters to them most—is just as important as how you're speaking to them.

Specializing in technology and B2B clients and located near Research Triangle in North Carolina, Crossroads looks to reach entrepreneurs with startups who are looking to take their communications to the next level.

The agency even has a separate site, Techpreneurspotlight.com, which

specifically addresses this audience. Meanwhile, the main site caters to that audience plus prospective clients looking for an integrated PR approach and companies looking to beef up their existing PR/marketing efforts.

The redesign is based on comprehensive Web analytics. “We want to make sure everything we offer on the site is making an impact,” Ramsey says. Specifically, the Crossroads “About Us” page will be ramped up, while a “Services” page will be replaced by a “Methodologies” page.

Particularly important to a small agency is SEO capabilities. On that end, Crossroads has redesigned the site in WordPress, a more robust Web platform for SEO.

Search capability is also important for **Hunter PR's** website. A major reason that the Hunter site was relaunched in May 2012 was for SEO purposes, says **Samara Mormar**, senior VP of business development and marketing.

The agency, with about 100 staffers, doesn't take the effectiveness of its website lightly. “It's a huge communications tool,” Mormar says. “It needs to promote our capabilities, personality and experience. And all of that is linked to our digital proficiency.”

That proficiency hinges on the site's interactive capabilities, which means full integration of Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter. During the past three years, Hunter has brought more digital and social services in-house. “We used to launch microsites for clients,” Mormar says. “Now it's Facebook apps, mobile apps [and] fully robust websites.”

Those capabilities are now reflective of Hunter's own site, proving that, when it comes to PR agency websites, it's best to walk the talk. PRN

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Category	<i>Total</i>	<i>Top 50</i>	<i>Bottom 50</i>
Ease of interface			
Site map	14.7	24.0	5.8
Major links to rest of site	98.0	98.0	98.1
Search engine box	19.6	36.0	3.8
Logo of organization on front page	92.2	88.0	96.2
Usefulness to clients potential clients			
Agency contact information	99.0	100.0	98.1
Password-protected area for clients	6.9	10.0	3.8
List of agency leadership	80.4	74.0	86.5
Client list	85.3	82.0	88.5
Area of agency expertise	93.1	96.0	90.4
Client testimonials	27.5	28.0	26.9
Case studies	57.8	68.0	48.1
Publicity about clients/projects	89.2	88.0	90.4
Opportunity to request information	11.8	16.0	7.7
Conservation of visitors			
Important information on first page	70.6	64.0	76.9
Post time and date of last update	2.9	0.0	5.8
Quick links to rest of site	61.8	70.0	53.8

Based on a list of 102 top-grossing U.S. PR agencies, this study of agency websites shows that access to useful information were abundant, yet features that would enable stickiness was lacking.