10 essential questions to answer
When you are ready to take your site to the next level!
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About the Author

Web Design expert Brian DeLaet shows you what questions to ask, and how to answer them, as you plan your web site or web site redesign. He started in web design in the early 90’s when the university in Japan that he was working at asked him to help design the site. From that first volunteer position until now, he has been hooked on building excellent, conversion-optimized websites that are easy to find in the search engines. Returning to the US in 1998, Brian and his wife Maki founded EduCyber in the Denver area and together they have been building and marketing web sites since then.

Today Brian speaks frequently on Internet related topics from web site design to search marketing to social media marketing. You can find his latest speaking engagements on his web site at www.educyber.com. He also blogs regularly at www.educyber.com/blog and you can sign up for the latest newsletter at bottom of the page at http://www.educyber.com/.

This ebook is a compilation of blogs that help you understand what questions to ask and answer as you design a web site. You may reprint any item in this ebook in your own newsletter, ezine, or blog as long as you print each article in its entirety and include “by Brian DeLaet, check out his blog at www.educyber.com/blog”.

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1. What are my goals for my web site?

The first question is “What are the goals for my web site?” While the question seems simple enough, a lot of people struggle with this one. Too frequently the complete answer we get is “Because everyone else has a site.” Putting aside the parental instinct to reply “if everyone was jumping off a cliff, would you?” we sit down and talk about what reasonable goals people can set for their web site.

If you are selling goods or services via your web site, you will want to set some kind of sales goals. If the site already exists, perhaps your goal will be to increase sales 50% over the course of the next year with a redesigned web site. If the site is brand new, you can set a dollar goal for numbers of sales.

Even if you aren’t selling anything on your site, you should still set goals. We track where every new customer comes from. So we know when we get a new customer through our web site as opposed to getting it through word of mouth. If your goal is to get 5 new customers through your web site each quarter, this will help you plan out your site. I had one client who had an existing site and he stated that his goal was to educate customers. I said he must be doing a very good job because the page we were looking at had 100s of visitors but almost no conversion to customers.

He looked at me for a moment and then said, “Well ultimately I’d like them to call.” I gently asked him where his phone number was on the page and suddenly a great big light bulb went off inside his head. Now that he had a goal - get people to call - he could evaluate his site and make changes as needed.
2. How do I expect people to find my site?

The Kevin Costner approach in Field of Dreams does not work. I can’t tell you the times I’ve spoken with people who honestly believe “If I build it, they will come.” But it just isn’t so. If you want to get people to come to visit your site, you have to have a plan to market that site.

Here’s a quick list of ways you can plan for traffic to your site:

1. Make sure every piece of paper and email you generate lists your web address
2. Run a Pay Per Click campaign in one or more of the search engines
3. Provide an incentive for current or past clients to come and visit - include that in your newsletter
4. Build quality backlinks to your site
5. Ensure that your site is optimized for search engines like Google
6. Get involved in social media and reference your site as appropriate
7. Highlight your site in any print advertising you do
8. Create a blog on your site and post to it regularly so that people have a reason to come back

These ideas are just intended to help you get the creative juices flowing. The important thing is that you have a plan for your site and then you go about implementing that plan.

3. What do I want people to do when they get to my site?

OK, once you’ve got a plan (the goals for your web site) and you have a marketing plan (what will drive people to your site?) it’s time to figure out what you want people to do when they get to your site. This is a pretty basic concept and yet one that is often overlooked.

There are various actions that you, as a web site owner, may want your visitors to do on any given page or process of pages. These actions will make the most sense if we start with: “I want the visitor to”

- call for a quote or appointment
- fill out a form requesting more information
- subscribe to my newsletter
- buy something from my online store
- create a profile on my blog
• contribute their expertise on my forum
• tell three friends about my site

This is by no means a complete list but hopefully helps you think about what you want to accomplish with your site. Once you understand WHAT you want people to do, you can begin to figure out HOW they should do it.

Once I asked a client whose ad campaign we were managing what he wanted the visitor who clicked through to a particular page to do. He replied “I want to educate them.” I waited a few seconds and finally he came out with “Eventually I want them to call me.” That made my next question very easy - “Where is your phone number?” I asked. “Oh.”

The next day he had not only put his phone number very prominently on the page, he had also created a page that let visitors ask for more information online. The point of the story is that once you have determined what you want people to do on your page, make sure it is easy for them to do it.

4. What niche does my business serve that sets it apart from my competitors and how can I leverage that through my site?

Understanding clearly what it is that you offer, and who’s buying it, can help you take your business to the next level. If you offer a service for example - say you trim trees for homeowners - then you have an obvious niche that you serve. If you’re based in Wheat Ridge (like we are) you can say you serve the Denver Metro Area. You don’t want someone from New Jersey contacting you about trimming their trees and they don’t want to waste their time either. So you can focus on your immediate area.

Continuing on the localization theme, why not target the key phrase “Wheat Ridge” or “Wheat Ridge tree trimmer”? Sure there many only be a handful of people who search for that each year. But wouldn’t you want those people to be your customers? So localization is one way of determining your niche.

But there are others. The constant message I hammer is Define Your Target. Some of my customers get hung up on the fact that “well my target is here but I also have customers over in this category”. Don’t think about that! Define your ideal target customer. Then develop all of your marketing, including your web site marketing strategies, around that target. When you’re playing darts, you never hit the bull’s eye with every dart. But the more you practice aiming
straight for the bull’s eye, the better you get at hitting it. And some of your darts will inevitably end up missing the target all together. Same with your clients. Some will not be anything like your target. And that’s OK. But the more you aim for your target, the more customers you’ll get that are in close to your ideal.

Other examples of defining your niche or target:

Deal in Real Estate? Residential or Commercial? New homes or existing homes? Sell a lot of ranch homes? A lot of tudor homes? Specialize in relocations? Work with a lot of divorced people?

Selling stick dolls online? Who has been buying them? What do you know about them? Mostly female? Mostly in their 30’s? Single? Married? Buying for themselves? Buying as a gift?

Once you’ve defined your niche, make sure that you’re targeting keywords that fit that niche. Also if you have identified a certain demographic, use tools such as Mark Kassof (focuses on radio but a lot of carryover to the web) to help you understand how to target that niche that you have defined.

5. What will keep people coming back to my web site?

This question has a simple answer. In a word “Good content”. OK, that’s two words. Taking the time to write or get good content on your site is the single best way to keep people coming back. A site with lots of visitors can create community through user interactions. If your site is smaller or has fewer visitors, this can be counter-productive though.

Having a stale site, without any fresh content, certainly isn’t going to help people come back although it might not hurt your search engine rankings. But having a fresh site with new or regularly changing content will provide a hook that keeps people coming back for more.

Here are 5 ways you can provide people a reason to keep coming back:

a. Offer seasonal / monthly / weekly specials for your products or services.

b. Become an expert in your field. Publish an e-newsletter demonstrating your expertise.

c. Write your very own web blog – (blog). It isn’t nearly as difficult as it may sound and it is another way of becoming an expert in your field while also demonstrating your mastery of cyberspace.

d. Write articles for other web sites. There are article directories that would be happy to help you share your expertise.

e. If you’re not a writer, you can get good articles from a variety of sources and post them
6. What words do I expect people to have searched for when they click through to my site?

Now the conversation turns very clearly to Search Engine Marketing (SEM). There are many facets to SEM. Two of the biggest are Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and Pay per Click (PPC).

So first you must determine what key words your customers search for. Notice how I worded that. Not what you think they search for but what they actually do search for. Many business owners are so focused on what they are selling that they don’t take time to realize what their customers are buying. For example, a hair stylist might think she is selling “professionally styled hair” while her ideal customer might be searching for “good haircut” at a “good price”.

There are several good free tools that will help you determine other related keywords. We really like and recommend the Google Adwords Keyword Planner. When I visit this site and type in “collision repair” I get 45 different suggestions of ad GROUPS and 101 different key word PHRASES. Some are obvious like “auto collision repair” and “auto body shops” but there are a few very nice surprises there as well, like “car painting” and “estimate collision repair” that would probably lead to good customers.

The beauty of this tool is that you can also see what the competition is for a certain keyword. If you find some that have lots of searches but little competition, you have just found a niche that you can capitalize on.

Work with your website designer to optimize your site and then you are ready to go with SEO and PPC. We’ll deal with both of these with the next question.

7. Is my site currently ranked in the search engines?

A simple search can show you if your site is ranked in the top 10 or not. But you have to know what people are searching for. For example, we recently redesigned a lawyer’s web site. A part of that redesign was preparing it for the search engines. Through one of our research tools (Nichebot), we discovered a combination of key words that people are searching for that none of the competition is optimizing their sites for. We’ll just come right out and tell you it is a personal injury law practice. One of the terms we were researching was denver workers compensation lawyer. The research showed that adding Pinnacol (the state of Colorado’s largest worker’s comp insurance company) to the phrase could get some highly targeted traffic; we knew we were on to something.
So when you ask yourself “Is my site ranked?” you need to think carefully, “ranked for what?”

Doing keyword research is very important but you can also get ideas about how your site ranks for key phrases by examining your web statistics. Google analytics or awstats are two methods that we use to track what happens on sites. By looking at the stats, you can see what people are actually searching for in the search engines when they click through to your site. This information can be used to figure out if and how your site is ranked. This in turn can help you determine how and what search engine marketing strategies you need to implement in your site.

8. What colors and images or logos do I have that can be used to keep my BRAND in front of people?

Brand. Brand. Brand. It really IS all about brand. We’ve worked with several small businesses who started out saying that they were too small to need a brand. As they saw it working though, they realized that even their small business had a brand and by actively managing it they could help their company grow.

There are lots of good resources for building your brand and understanding how to build your brand. Here’s the first video in a series of videos on branding your small business.

Are you saying “But I don’t have a brand”, let’s stop and think about it for a minute. Pull out your business cards. Take a look at your brochure. Point your browser to your web site. And ask yourself these questions:

1. What images do you see?
2. Are there similar or identical images?
3. Do those images or pictures resonate with you?
4. What colors are you using consistently? Do they represent who you are?
5. Are there other images that more accurately reflect your business?
6. Are there colors missing from our schemes?

If you need help with your brand we can help you and partner with some of our colleagues who specialize in this area. Give us a call if you’d like some help or a referral. Once your colors and brand are determined, make sure that you integrate it or have your web designer integrate it into your web site.
9. Should my site be set up with a shopping cart?

For the most part this seems like a simple question. If you sell stuff, you should have a shopping cart. If you sell any kind of product it makes sense. This includes video and audio that can be downloaded. There are a variety of ways that you can protect your files so that even with a download it is not likely to be copied or misused.

So anything that can be downloaded can also be sold.

- Pictures? Yes, you should have a site.
- Maps? Yes.

What if you’re a non-profit? Absolutely. Why wouldn’t you want to make it easy for donors or potential donors to contribute to your cause? In this case the beauty of the Internet is that it makes it easy for people from anywhere to help support you. If you build wells in Africa, you want to be able to accept donations from Texas or Tanzania or Tasmania. If you’re saving whales in Alaska, you want donors from Mississippi or Mauritania or the Maldives.

What about if you offer a service instead of stuff? There are still several reasons you should consider taking payment online through a shopping cart on your site. If you offer packages with set prices then it is a no-brainer. Yes you should. Even if you charge by the project or by the hour you can still set up your shopping cart so that you can accept payment. Depending on the cart you use and how you configure it, you can have invoices available online that the customer pays or you can have the customer enter the order total.

Virtually any kind of business, even a non-profit corporation, can benefit from a shopping cart. With the growth in very affordable merchant accounts and gateways, it doesn’t take too many payments or donations before it really begins to make sense to use a cart and accept credit cards.

10. How can I use Work of Mouth marketing to improve my web site?

The 10th question in our 10 questions to ask when you’re ready to take your site to the next level is probably THE most important question around today. Word of Mouth marketing. I’m a pretty good customer. When I’m happy with a business, I will go out of my way to tell others about it. During any given month I might tell five to ten others about a business I like.
But we can translate Word Of Mouth Marketing onto the web in all kinds of powerful ways. Welcome to Web 2.0 and in particular the social nature of 2.0. There are lots of ways you can interact with others on the Internet in a meaningful way. When I say meaningful, I mean actual interaction with others, not just logging on, spouting off your sales pitch and logging off.

Here are three sites you can log into, create a profile, and find others of similar interests:

1. [Facebook.com](http://facebook.com)
2. [Twitter.com](http://twitter.com)
3. [LinkedIn.com](http://linkedin.com)

Visit the sites above to connect with others. Make sure you spend FIVE minutes a day logging in and communicating and don’t be surprised if your five minutes turns into 30.

Here are three visual social media sites you can use:

1. [YouTube.com](http://youtube.com)
2. [Pinterest.com](http://pinterest.com)
3. [Instagram.com](http://instagram.com)

Using images, whether they be static (pictures) or moving (video) you have a great opportunity to show your good or services in unique ways.

Here are three social bookmarking sites you can use to generate additional buzz about your posts in the links above and about your own site:

1. [Delicious.com](http://delicious.com)
2. [Digg.com](http://digg.com)
3. [Stumbleupon.com](http://stumbleupon.com)

At first some of this might seem a bit arcane but if you spend just a “wee bit” of time on this on a regular basis, you’ll be very pleasantly surprised to see how the traffic starts beating a path to your web site.