How to improve your sites popularity

We would all love to live in one of those designer houses that we see in magazines. You know the type, the ones where every piece of furniture co-ordinates which each other, where there is no superfluous junk mail or kids toys strewn around the lounge room, where the flowers are real and always fresh, and where our visitors can call in totally unannounced and be greeted with the aroma of freshly baked treats and a fresh pot of coffee on the boil.

Unfortunately for most of us the distance between this image and reality is filled with poor time management skills, responsibilities of parenting and/or partnering, financial constraints and a bevy of excuses that we have all heard before.

Though I can't help you in sorting out your actual abode, I am going to share with you some strategies for ensuring that visitors arriving at your virtual home, that is your web site, are treated like royalty as soon as they arrive.

Prepare for Visitors

Visitors dropping in unannounced might be a scary situation at home, but at your website it's exactly what you want to happen, so you have to prepare for it.

❖ Your website needs to be kept in order at all times. **Ensure that your content is current and relevant**. Get rid of any clutter like out-dated information, non-relevant images and alike. After all, it's better to have no flowers on display, than have dead ones out on show.

❖ Dust off the cobwebs from those pages on your site that are not frequently visited, maybe a quick renovation of pictures, typography and alike **might make the space more attractive to your viewers**. We all have a 'junk room' where we store those items that just don't belong elsewhere in the house, but we rarely leave the door open for our guests to see the mess. If it isn't necessary – get rid of it.

Have a "Do Drop In" Policy

No matter how beautiful your house is, no one is going to visit you if they don't know you even exist. **Get your (site) address out there and let everyone know that your site is the place to be**. Why do you think that nightclubs put their name and logo on matches, coasters, napkins and alike? It's called creating an 'identity' – you need to create one and then use it to the max!

❖ Have a calling-card that lets people know who you are, what you do and where they can find you. Ensure that your site address is included on all products and paraphernalia that you distribute.

❖ Create email signatures with hyperlinks to your site and use this on all your emails, not just work related ones.

❖ Advertise yourself through blog signatures, forum posts, business cards, product placement, sponsorship, etc. **Basically 'be seen'!**

Get Out Grandma's China for Those Special Guests

We all love to feel special. To be treated just that little bit better than everyone else. To be upgraded to first class on a flight, or given the deluxe suite at no extra cost. Treat your customers to a special pampering that is just for them and show them how special you think they really are.

❖ **Turn part of your site into a 'members only'** area and use this space to reward your customers with free product and services.

❖ **Create newsletters** for your members which offer exclusive deals just for them. Ensure that your newsletters are regular, brief and informative with a distinct 'call to action' to encourage people to visit your site regularly.

❖ Encourage customers to share the love and "bring a friend" when they visit. Offer bonuses for referrals, after all your current customers are your best form of advertising.

Let's Get Up-Close and Personal

Websites are often perceived to be rather impersonal areas to be in. It can feel like we are being taken on a tour of a beautiful residence by some generic tour-guide who only shows us what they want us to see. What we really want though is to talk to the owners and ask them all the juicy questions like where did they get the great chandelier in the foyer, and how can I make my lawn as green as theirs?

❖ Interacting with your clients has never been easier than now due to the freedom and flexibility of social media. Creating a Facebook presence and using this, or one of the many other social media avenues, enhances the personal aspect of your business. People like to take a peek behind the curtains to see the 'real you' and **social media is your opportunity to communicate with customers on equal terms.**

❖ Establish a relationship with your clients; show them that their opinions are valued by using them as sounding boards for new or updated products and services. Create questionnaires to gain feedback and promote these with incentives if completed.

❖ Add an interactive element to your site by creating a chat room or message board where people who have similar interests can interact and share ideas. Creating a sense of community will encourage clients to return to your site regularly, not only when they require your products.

Shout It Out LOUD!

Think about this for a moment; who do you go to if you want advice on how to bake a cake, or prune a tree or buy a car? Most of us will ask for help from someone we trust and who has knowledge in that field. No matter how good you are at what you do, if people aren't aware of your knowledge they won't come looking to you for advice. Basically get yourself known as a specialist in your field.

❖ Offer to write content for blogs, e-zines, magazines and other publications. **A by-line with your name and website is a great form of self-promotion** and a great way to get traffic to your site.

❖ Volunteer your services to not-for-profit organisations. Not only is this a great way of networking, but it gets your name out into the wider community and shows a caring and humane side of your business.

❖ Wear your company logo on your t-shirt, hat, car, etc. Make your brand public knowledge.

No One Gets It Right All of the Time

No matter how much preparation we put in to things, we can be assured that Murphy's Law will win in the end. Be it a typo on your site, a broken link, an order going astray or a customer misunderstanding your T&Cs, problems will occur and you just have to face them the best you can. It only takes one unhappy customer to make a negative comment and your reputation is tainted in the eyes of all their friends and colleagues. Pre-empting possible issues by clarifying terms and conditions in plain English is always a good place to start, as is clearly stating exclusions and any extra costs that a customer may not be aware of.

❖ When an error on your site is brought to your attention acknowledge it and deal with it straight away. If your error has caused any inconvenience for a customer, as in overcharging or delay in delivery, **make sure you take responsibility, personally apologise and make restitution as quickly as possible.**

❖ **Follow up with clients post sale** to see if they are happy with your service and product. Collecting feedback from customers in regards to their experience is another way to show that you value their opinion. Mind you, there does need to be visible action on the issues raised or else you are simply wasting both your own and your customer's time.

❖ **Create a "Frequently Asked Questions" section** on your site, where visitors can source information they require about your goods and services. Update this section regularly based on the feedback you receive from customers. FAQs save you time in answering individual customer queries, and save the customer time in not having to await your reply.

Making your website popular requires commitment of time, dedication to detail and an open-minded approach. Ultimately you can have the best house on the street, with all the latest mod-cons and views to die for, but if people don't feel comfortable when they walk up your pathway and knock on the front door you may as well be living in a cardboard box.

A well-designed web site is definitely important, but design alone isn't what keeps your customers coming back. It's that personal touch when someone you know opens the door for you and welcomes you in: *that is the clincher.*

For more suggestions on how you can increase site traffic please visit me at Papier Mouse Designs.