

The Seven Secrets of Highly Successful Websites

A White Paper By



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The Seven Secrets of Highly Successful Websites

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Executive Summary

Secret #1: Focus

The more focused a website is, the more successful it is likely to be. *If you try to be everything to everybody, you end up being nothing to nobody.* Instead, offer a specific product, selection, service or proposition, tailored and targeted to a specific identifiable market segment. If you have diverse offerings, promote them using separate domains and individually-focused websites.



Secret #2: Differentiation

Differentiators are the unique selling propositions that distinguish your offerings from those of the competition. The most compelling differentiator is to be the only or *exclusive* source for a valuable commodity. Next come *superlatives*, like Best, Highest, Most Popular or Number One. Then *comparatives*, like Better, Faster, Higher or Lower. Price-based differentiation is the least compelling, and most difficult to maintain.

Secret #3: Persuasiveness

Persuasive websites offer valuable propositions with compelling differentiators that convince a visitor to answer their *call-to-action*, which is typically an invitation to click, call or come by. Persuading qualified traffic to become a prospect, client, customer or convert is the essence of web marketing. Every aspect of your website has an impact on persuasiveness, and the highest conversion rates are attained by effectively matching message and medium to market.

Secret #4: Professionalism

In cyberspace, *your website is your business*, and the impression it makes when visitors first click through can make a small business look Fortune 500 ... or a global enterprise look like a spam merchant. The only way to get a professionally-designed website is to hire a web design professional who understands that business websites must not only look good but also rank high and get conversions. If you use some teenager or template to do-it-yourself in a day, the end result will likely do your business more harm than good.

Secret #5: Compliance

A primary concern of all website owners should be to have a website that promotes their products and services to *all potential customers*. Websites with coding errors or pages that

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can only be viewed properly on selected browsers will frustrate visitors and limit sales opportunities. Validated W3C standards compliance assures that you are maximizing all potential returns on your website investment.

Secret #6: Links

A *link* is a selectable connection between one web page and another. Links are what makes the World Wide Web a web! Both the quantity and quality of links, especially incoming links, can have a significant impact on the search engine rankings, traffic and overall success of a website. The best incoming links to have are those served up in the first 20 positions of *search engine results*. Other link sources include online directories, reciprocal links or link exchange programs, online media publicity, and links from complementary websites.

Secret #7: Positioning

Having all the attributes above won't count for much ... unless you also have **Pervasive Positioning™**. The bottom line is this:

- **99%** of Internet surfers use search engines to find what they need online.
- **97%** of all that traffic is captured by the first 20 listings on any search.
- **95%** of our clients hold Top 20 Positions on major search engines.
- **75%** of our clients hold Number 1 Rankings on major search engines!

Can we get one for you?

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Secret #1: Focus

The more focused your website is, the more effective it will be. Highly successful websites project a clear and unmistakable message that is:

- **Tailored** ... to a specific audience,
- **Concentrated** ... on a specific proposition, and
- **Targeted** ... for a specific action.

1.1 Tailored ... to a Specific Audience

If you try to be everything to everybody, you end up being nothing to nobody.

Although the mission of most advertisers is to convince clients and customers otherwise, the reality is that there are very few products needed by everyone, and few if any propositions that appeal to everybody. Sure, everybody on the Web needs a computer (e.g. IBM), an operating system (e.g. Microsoft), Internet access (e.g. Earthlink), and a search engine (e.g. Google). And maybe just maybe everybody needs your revolutionary new red widget. But you won't sell many by trying to be all things to all people.

Why? Because *everybody* doesn't buy things. *Somebody* buys things, and that individual has distinct tastes and preferences. If you want to sell your widget to somebody, and perhaps many others like them, you need to

- identify the demographics of the market segment most likely to be interested in what you have to offer, and
- tailor your message to that audience.

1.2 Concentrated ... on a Specific Proposition

If everything is flagged as important, nothing will be seen as important.

For most business websites, the typical first-time visitor is somebody who referenced a search engine seeking information on a specific topic to fill a specific need, clicked a ranked listing for the site, and landed on their web pages. It follows that the first thing they expect to see is a specific answer to their query, solution to their problem, or product that fits their requirements. And being busy people with short attention spans, if what they seek is not presented in a clear and quickly comprehensible format, they are probably going to click their *Back* button and go to the next listing.

You, your organization or your enterprise may offer many things to many people, but don't try to offer them all on one web page! Instead, assign a specific objective to each page on your site, and then design every major element of the presentation to contribute to the



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achievement of that objective. Links to related pages are expected, and links to complementary sites are fine. But stay on point, emphasize what's important, and only what's important.

1.3 Targeted ... for a Specific Action

If they have to guess, you don't pass the test.

On highly successful websites, every web page has a purpose. That purpose may be as broad as conveying information, or as narrow as convincing a customer to purchase red widget number SKU-532. And if that purpose includes a *call-to-action*, it should be clear, concise, easy to execute, and visually reinforced.

Order now... Add to cart... Complete this survey... Take this test... Use this form... Call for a free consultation... Come see us... Go here next... Never waste their time. Never leave them hanging. Never get them frustrated. And never leave them guessing about what you want them to do.

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Secret #2: Differentiation

Pervasive Positioning™ brings visitors to your website, and compelling differentiation converts them into clients and customers. Differentiators are what you combine to create the unique selling propositions (USPs) that distinguish your offerings from those of the competition.

The most compelling differentiator is to be the only or **exclusive** source for a valuable commodity or solution. Next come the **superlative** differentiators like *Best, Highest, Most Popular* or *Number One*. Then there are **comparative** differentiators like *Better, Faster, Higher* or *Lower*. Price-based differentiation is the least compelling, and the most difficult to maintain.



2.1 Exclusive Differentiators

No differentiator is more compelling than being the sole source for a unique product or proposition. If it is truly one-of-a-kind and yours is the only place to get it, you should be well on your way to success!

Exclusive differentiators often include one or more of the following terms: different, exceptional, exclusive, extraordinary, incomparable, lone, matchless, novel, one and only, peerless, single, singly, singular, solely, solitary, solo, standout, unequalled, unique, unmatched, unparalleled, unprecedented, unrivaled.

Example: *PervasivePersuasion.com is your exclusive South Florida source for fully W3C compliant web design.*

2.2 Superlative Differentiators

If you can't corner the market, being first in order, best in quality, or highest in degree means you can still dominate it. Everybody likes a winner, so don't be reluctant to trumpet your Number One rankings and Most Popular ratings!

Superlative differentiators often include one or more of the following terms: ace, best, biggest, champion, chief, choicest, consummate, crack, extreme, finest, first-rate, foremost, greatest, highest, largest, leading, most, number one, optimum, paramount, pre-eminent, prime, primo, standout, super, superb, superlative, supreme, top, unsurpassed, winner.

Example: *Bruce Arnold is unsurpassed in his ability to deliver Top 20 search engine rankings.*

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2.3 Comparative Differentiators

If you aren't the best, you can still be better than the rest. Your proposition may not be unrivaled and the competition may be considerable, but you can still succeed if your offering is perceived as relatively desirable and preferable to others.

Comparative differentiators often include one or more of the following terms: better, bigger, choice, desirable, finer, fitter, fitting, greater, higher, improved, larger, more, preferable, preferred, quality, select, suitable, surpassing, useful, valuable, worthier.

Example: *Websites designed by Bruce Arnold rank higher, attract more traffic and achieve higher conversion rates.*

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Secret #3: Persuasiveness

In dictionary-speak, a message is persuasive if it has the power to induce someone to undertake a course of action or embrace a point of view by means of argument, reasoning, request, petition or plea. In web parlance, that *someone* is a qualified visitor to your website, and the *course of action* is your call-to-action, usually an invitation to:

- **click**, as in a BUY NOW, ADD TO CART or form SUBMIT button,
- **call**, as in a toll-free telephone number, or
- **come by**, as in physically show up at a brick-and-mortar location.



3.1 Conversion: Closing the Deal

Each visitor that accepts your invitation is called a *convert*, and each time a browser becomes a buyer counts as a conversion. The percentage of your website visitors that convert defines your conversion ratio, and the objective of persuasive web design is to optimize that number. Persuasive websites accomplish that by combining:

- Focused value propositions with clear benefits,
- Differentiators with compelling advantages, and
- Calls-to-action that are coherent and comforting.

We have previously discussed **focus** and **differentiation**, so next we'll explore what makes a call-to-action coherent and comforting.

3.2 Coherence: Logical Appeal

A call-to-action is coherent if the manner in which it's presented is both logically ordered and aesthetically pleasing. It passes the coherence test if a prospect can comprehend as well as complete the action (e.g., fill out their loan application, or check out with their purchase) in a reasonable amount of time and with an acceptable amount of effort.

Make sure your call-to-action does not come across as being "... more trouble than it's worth." People might be willing to spend fifteen minutes completing a \$450,000 mortgage application, but if it takes more than five to purchase your picture frames, you may be asking for abandonment.

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3.3 Comfort: Emotional Appeal

People execute calls-to-action if and only if they are *persuaded to make a decision to do so*, and there are few decisions in which emotion does not play a role. In the web marketing context, for example, the benefits may be clear and the advantages compelling, but potential converts also need the comfort of knowing they can trust you to deliver the goods.

Explicit assurances of trust increase consumer confidence and prospect comfort levels:

- For websites promoting services, these assurances might include professional certifications, authoritative and influential endorsements, or other third-party attestations.
- For e-commerce sites, they include trusted third-party payment services, business integrity and website security certifications, product warranties and guarantees, and published return and privacy policies.

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Secret #4: Professionalism

Successful marketers know that *you only get one chance to make a first impression*. In cyberspace, your website *is* your business, and the impression it makes when a visitor first clicks through can make a small business look Fortune 500 ... or a global enterprise look like a spam merchant.

It may be obvious that professionalism is key to capturing and keeping cyberspace customers. Perhaps not so obvious is what it takes to make a website look professional. It's one of those cases where people often say "... I can't define it, but I know it when I see it." Actually, professionalism can be defined as meeting two basic requirements:



- Professionalism mandates *adherence to professional standards*. We will address that aspect separately in our discussion of W3C standards compliance.
- Professionalism demonstrates application of the *expert knowledge base and skill sets* associated with a specific field of endeavor.

Walk into any Barnes & Noble and you'll find shelves--if not aisles--filled with books about *web design*. We will not attempt to replicate or even summarize the professional web designer's knowledge base or skill set here, but we will make two observations:

First, professional business website design requires mastery of several core competencies, including but not limited to:

- Business operations
- Marketing strategies
- Selling techniques
- Internet technologies
- Software engineering
- Graphics design
- Copy writing

This blend of expertise cannot be developed overnight. It is not provided by "do-it-yourself" alternatives. And no neophyte computer skills can compensate for the lack of it.

Second, although identifying all the elements of professional web design is beyond the scope of this discussion, there are three characteristics which suggest their presence:

- **Clarity** ... of purpose, presentation and organization.
- **Consistency** ... in appearance, imagery and architecture.
- **Content** ... that is credible, concise and correct.

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4.1 Clarity

Clarity of purpose ... is achieved by making the mission of the website and the message of the web page clear and unmistakable. Attention must be paid not only to what is being said, but also how it is worded, and how it might be (mis)perceived or (mis)interpreted.

Clarity of presentation ... is achieved by optimizing the visual appeal and readability of the web pages. Graphics, backgrounds, colors, fonts, *space*, their attributes and their associations all have a significant impact on customer experience as well as content comprehension.

Clarity of organization ... is achieved by logically dividing content and functionality among the pages of the website, neatly arranging the elements of each page, and providing site navigation that is unifying and unambiguous.

4.2 Consistency

Consistency in appearance ... is accomplished by developing an integrated look-and-feel or *template* for the website, and then uniformly applying that template in the design and layout of each web page. As visitors navigate from one web page to another, it should be obvious to them that they are still at the same website.

Consistency in imagery ... is accomplished by selecting images and creating graphics that are not only compatible with the website template but also reinforce the web page message. A picture *is* worth a thousand words, and it should be the right thousand words.

Consistency in architecture ... is accomplished by applying standardized navigation utilities and common linking conventions throughout the website. The architecture conveyed to a visitor by any arbitrary landing page should remain constant throughout their visit.

4.3 Content

Content is credible ... if the message it conveys is obviously true, rationally incontrovertible, persuasively delivered and authoritatively verified. Assertions should be supported or supportable, and visitors must be able to believe what is being said in the context of who is saying it and why.

Content is concise ... if the proposition is stated and case made in as few words as possible. Where extensive content is critical, use a top-down presentation so that *VITOs* (very important top officers) have a quick summary, and *SeeMores* (people who always want to see more information) can drill down for the details.

Content is correct ... if the information is reliably accurate and there are no semantic, syntactic or spelling errors. Correctness, like so many aspects of web design, is best assessed in the context of the target market. As such, it should be viewed as a relative more so than absolute measure.

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Secret #5: Compliance

The **World Wide Web Consortium (W3C)** was established in 1994 to lead the Web to its full potential by developing standards and protocols that promote its evolution while assuring interoperability. Validating web page compliance with these standards and protocols insures that all users--regardless of their culture, language, education, ability, material resources, access devices or physical limitations--have equal access to the resources of your website.



5.1 Validation

The importance of HTML and CSS validation to winning web design is frequently overlooked, but should not be underestimated:

- **Compatibility.** Validating W3C standards compliance assures that your web pages can be properly read and interpreted, regardless of what standards-compliant user agent might be employed. These include Internet Explorer, Netscape Navigator, Mozilla Firefox, all other graphical browsers, text-mode browsers, text-to-speech synthesizers, site robots, language translators and search engine spiders.
- **Coverage.** Web pages that can only be viewed properly on select browsers will frustrate visitors and thereby limit sales opportunities.
- **Quality.** The primary concern of every professional web designer should be to produce a website that promotes the products and services of the client to all potential customers.

5.2 Testing

Are your web pages W3C standards compliant? It's easy enough to find out:

- **HTML.** Submit your web pages for HTML validation here:

<http://validator.w3.org/>

- **CSS.** If your website employs CSS (cascading style sheets), and it probably should, submit your style sheets for validation here:

<http://jigsaw.w3.org/css-validator/>

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- **Links.** Link validation is not an element of standards compliance, but it is certainly an element of quality assurance. The W3C offers a link validator here:

<http://validator.w3.org/checklink/>

5.3 Assurance

According to a 2005 survey of all web design firms with page one placements on Google, MSN Search or Yahoo for the search term *web design miami*, only Bruce Arnold's **PervasivePersuasion.com** was found to have **100% W3C compliant coding**. The other 25 sites tested were found to have as many as 171 errors on their home page alone!

If the W3C validators (see links above) find errors in your HTML or CSS, then it may be time to consider redesigning your website. If that is the case, then your next step might be to run some web pages from your web designer's website through the validators. If you find errors there, then it may be time to consider hiring a new web designer.

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Secret #6: Links

The Internet's World Wide Web is a medium through which millions of websites serve up billions of web pages written in a language called HTML and interconnected via *hypertext links*, also called *hyperlinks*, or simply *links*. A link is a selectable connection between one web page or object and another. The most common form of link is a highlighted image or string of text that, when selected by the click of a mouse, retrieves the selected page or object for viewing. The highlighted image or text is called an *anchor*, which together with its *reference* comprises the link.



Links are what makes the World Wide Web a web. And as you will learn by reading on, the quantity and quality of links can have a significant impact on both website search engine rankings and the overall success of an Internet website. For purposes of discussion, links can be categorized based on what they connect:

Internal links are links from one page at a website to another page (or object) at the same site. Internal links are used, for example, to build the website navigation panels that enable visitors to the site to select which pages they want to view.

External links are links from a page at one website to a page (or object) at another site. That other site might be located anywhere on the Internet, so these are the links that make the web "world wide." External links are either outgoing from, or incoming to, a website:

- **Outgoing links** are anchored on a page at the given website, and reference a page (or object) at some other website.
- **Incoming links** are anchored on a page at some site other than the given site, and reference a page (or object) at the given website.

Through their web designers or webmasters, website owners have complete control over their internal links. There are also few restrictions on their ability to incorporate outgoing links to just about any web resource they choose. Incoming links are a different story: Incoming links must be created by parties controlling other websites, who must be given the motivation and resources necessary to do so. All links are important to a website's search engine rankings ... incoming links especially so.

6.1 Connecting

All links are important. Without connecting links, there would be no World Wide Web ... and no search engines to sift through what approaches the accumulated knowledge of man.

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Links are logical constructs that have proven to be as fundamentally enabling to the traversal of global information as wheels are to land-based transportation.

- **Internal Links.** Internal links are important to website visitors because they indicate organization, enable navigation, and highlight key content. They are important to website owners because they can be combined to form an alluring architecture and convey prospects to calls-to-action. Well-designed internal links improve search engine on-page content rankings as well as visitor experience ratings.
- **Outgoing Links.** Outgoing links are important to website visitors because they can provide pointers to complementary websites and related online resources. They are important to website owners because links to authoritative or influential references can establish credibility and reinforce key messages. Well-designed outgoing links increase rankings, ratings and return visits without interfering with focus or interrupting presentational flow.
- **Incoming Links.** Incoming links are crucially important to both website owners and visitors ... because without them, there might be no website visitors! Over 99% of all first-time visitors are conveyed to a website by an incoming link, most of them served up by search engines. The "quantity and quality" of incoming links are as significant to search engine rankings and website traffic generation as "repetition and reinforcement" are to traditional advertising. A well-planned web marketing program targets and motivates a rich mix of sources for incoming links ... and a well-designed website provides the resources that enable them.

6.2 Increasing

There are many ways to increase the number of incoming links for your website, three being positions, partners and planning:

- **Positions.** The best incoming links to have are those served up in the first 20 positions of search engine results, and the best way to get there is to have your website (re)designed and keyword-optimized for **Pervasive Positioning™**. With some search engines, however, the full benefits of on-page optimization can only be realized in conjunction with a sufficient base of other quality incoming links.
- **Partners.** Other sources of incoming links include listings in online directories (general, categorical, commercial, industrial, organizational, political, social, professional, etc.), participation in reciprocal link or link exchange programs, mention in online news media, and references from other websites--especially those of complementary organizations like business associates, partners, suppliers, contractors, clients and customers.
- **Planning.** Aside from search engine submissions, which incoming link sources to target and how best to motivate them varies depending on website focus, value proposition, intended audience, branding and positioning, targeted search phrases, competitive density, and a number of other domain attributes and variables. A qualified web marketing professional can deliver an effective plan, but it is up to the website owner to act on it.

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6.3 Improving

Effective web marketing plans must consider not only the QUANTITY of incoming links, but more importantly the QUALITY of those links. So, how do you measure the “quality” of an incoming link? There are several criteria, but the three most important have to do with the anchor text, the link URL, and the referrer or source of the link:

- **Anchor text.** Anchor text is typically the highlighted, underlined text that, when clicked with a mouse, selects the web page or object located at the underlying link URL. The quality of a link is increased if the anchor text includes keywords reflecting the content of the web page or object located at the link URL. If you have a link to the website of a web designer named Bruce Arnold, for example, then “Web Design by Bruce Arnold” would be higher quality anchor text than “Click here for Bruce Arnold.”
- **Link URL.** The link URL is the web address (or file name) of the page or object selectable by the link. As with anchor text, the quality of a link is increased if the link URL includes keywords. If you have a link to the contact page of a web designer's website, for example, then

http://pervasivepersuasion.com/contact_web_designer.html

would be a higher quality link URL than

<http://pervasivepersuasion.com/contact.html>

- **Referrer.** The referrer or source of the link is the web page where the link is displayed. Generally speaking, a link on a website with high search engine ranking, heavy traffic and/or direct relevance offers more quality than one with low rankings, light traffic or no relation to subject matter. There are some serious exceptions to this rule, however. If you want to avoid the “gotchas,” we recommend you give us a call.

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Secret #7: Positioning

99% of all Internet users submit keywords to search engines to find what they need. 97% of that traffic goes to the first 20 websites returned by a search. Keyword optimization and search engine positioning is how you get into that "Top 20".

Search engine positioning is an art that goes beyond keyword stuffing and formatting META tags. **Pervasive Positioning™** is a science that goes way beyond that. It is a three-dimensional discipline targeting guaranteed delivery of qualified website traffic via:

- **submitting deep,**
- **matching wide,** and
- **ranking high.**



7.1 Submitting Deep

Surveys suggest that the top 18 search engines draw over 80% of all search activity, so the positioning of your web pages in the major indexes should be a priority. That is not to say, however, that the thousands of other online reference sources available should be ignored. Submitting your website to hundreds of domain-specific link lists, directories and other reference sources may result in less exposure than one Top 20 ranking in MSN Search, but that exposure may be to a much more qualified group of prospects. And the more reference sources that link to your website, the higher your rankings in the majors will be.

7.2 Matching Wide

Before you can enjoy the traffic associated with high rankings on key terms in major search engines, you must not only submit, but also match. If you do not match, you cannot rank. And the more relevant terms for which you do match, the more rankings you will achieve, and the more traffic your website will receive.

If you sell real estate in Miami, for example, a Top 20 Yahoo ranking on "Miami realtor" is certain to generate traffic. But what if instead of "Miami" they entered "South Florida", "Dade", "Pinecrest", "Kendall" or "South Beach"? And what if, instead of "realtor" they entered "real estate broker", "real estate agency", "real estate agent", "residential property", or "homes for sale"?

You cannot rank if you do not match.

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7.3 Ranking High

They say the keys to successful retailing are “location, location, location.” The Internet marketing analogy is “rankings, rankings, rankings.” For any given search, if and where a web page ranks is not a measure of quality or popularity, and it is not a simple matter of META tags and keyword repetition.

Web pages rank where they rank based on scoring algorithms programmed to apply dozens of criteria in evaluating almost every element of the page. Understand the search engines’ criteria, and you can design web pages that not only *look good* but also *rank high* on the *right terms* to generate *qualified traffic* and *deliver results*.

The bottom line is this:

- **99%** of Internet surfers use search engines to find what they need online.
- **97%** of all that traffic is captured by the first 20 listings on any search.
- **95%** of our clients hold Top 20 Positions on major search engines.
- **75%** of our clients hold Number 1 Rankings on major search engines!

Can we get one for you?