

Pro Training Inc. Website

Online Strategy

The Internet has provided business with new opportunities and avenues with which to reach their customers. The decision of whether to use and how to use an online strategy is an important one because of the significant investment of time and money that it requires. This study will examine how the president and CEO of Pro Training, Inc. (PRO) developed his online strategy, the costs involved with the implementation and maintenance of the website, and the challenges that were faced. It will also include the author's recommendations for areas of improvement.

Jack Snow, president and CEO of PRO, established the company website in the early 1990's. PRO provides "high-quality technical training for telecommunications companies", and Snow recognized the benefit that the website would provide (PRO, 2006). As he began to develop the plan for the company website, Snow focused not only on what the website should be able to do, but the ease of use and how the feel of the website would be interpreted by the user. The key aspect of his strategy was to maintain the users' interest once they entered the site. According to Snow, a user will usually decide within the first few clicks on a website whether the site addresses the need or issue at hand. If the answers are not readily apparent or accessible, the user will go elsewhere.

In addition to the initial emotional impact, setting up the function of the website was important. To do this, Snow solicited input from his employees and key customers. He also factored in the information available on competitor sites; both the information that was present and what was missing. He established a list of criteria that would meet a user's needs, such as available courses, schedules, news bulletins, and personal contact information. As much of this

information is dynamic, it was also important that Snow had access to update and maintain the information once the website was running. With his strategy focused on establishing an online presences and providing information to customers, he did not set tangible objectives. Although Snow does review the statistical data relating to the number of hits and most frequently viewed pages, his objectives were more subjective and centered on meeting his customers' needs.

In order to instill a professional image and structure to the website, Snow sought out qualified developers to design the site. It was important to find a designer that could take the criteria that Snow had compiled and develop the site. When implemented, the website structure was established so that PRO can maintain the information that is posted to the site and keep the data current and accurate. The cost of the implementation was tied to the complexity of the site's structure. For the initial implementation, which took place in the early 90's, the cost was estimated at \$8,000 and many man hours.

Finding the Right Resources:

The challenge that Snow first faced was to find qualified developers. There were many times where the web developers did not listen or pay attention to Snow's requirements. The list of needs for the website were either misunderstood or ignored. This lack of effective communication resulted in wasted time and effort. Ultimately, Snow was able to find developers with whom Snow found it assuring to work. These developers were able to translate his needs into the design. There was the assurance that the website was in capable hands, and Snow felt that the project had a wise investment in talent.

Return on Investment:

In addition to the initial implementation, PRO must also invest in continued maintenance. The website is stored on a separate server, which holds the website data and hosts the domain. This also allows the company to utilize email based off of the same domain name. The annual cost for the server is approximated at \$600. Because the internal users maintain the data, the only additional fee occurs if there is a major change. The addition of a new page or functionality to the website is outsourced to the professional web development firm. These types of changes to the site occur only occasionally and cost around \$500.

Overall, Snow believes that the investment into the website has been very profitable. Established for over ten years, the website has provided branding for the company, and the opportunity to provide a consistent, lasting location for information on PRO. The simple name makes it simple for satisfied customers to recommend PRO's services. And the website's longevity gives customers the assurance that PRO will be available to meet their needs for many years to come.

The PRO website continues to be user-friendly. The topic bar along the left side of the homepage gives the user an immediate sense of the information that will be available through the site. The courses and schedules tabs allow the user to find classes either by topic or by location. The "About" page provides a personal introduction to the company vision and purpose. And the easy availability of personal contact information allows the user to follow up on any questions or concerns in an expedient manner.

Recommendations:

One area of improvement is to create greater interaction between the course and schedule functionalities. While the user can check available courses by topic, the actual date and time of

those courses must be viewed through the schedule tool. If this two-step process could be reduced to a single tool, the user would be able to retrieve all needed information through one step. Additionally, an online registration process would eliminate the need for the user to print and fax enrollment forms. Instead, an online form could be sent to a shared email address for processing. These simple changes could help make this effective resource even better.