

Creating a Web Site for Your Consulting Business

**Consulting
Success
Library**

Volume 4

**Published by
American
Consultants League**

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SECOND EDITION

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Creating a Web Site for Your Consulting Business

There is a ton of material published — in books, seminars, and on the Web — on how to write, design, program, and build websites.

In this report, we cannot cover such a broad topic. Instead, we will talk specifically about websites for independent consultants — how they differ from the vast majority of websites, and the elements needed to make them effective marketing tools for your consulting business.

Consulting Websites Are Different

Since putting up my website www.bly.com in April 1998, I've received a ton of unsolicited e-mails, faxes, and phone calls — from casual Internet surfers as well as Web professionals — with all sorts of advice on how to make my site better.

Unfortunately, more than 90 percent of their suggestions are almost totally off the mark... and would be a complete waste of my time and money.

Why is this the case? It's not that site visitors don't have valid opinions on graphics or content... or that Web professionals don't have good ideas. They do.

The problem is, all the advice is given

with no thought as to the business objective of my site ... and whether the enhancement would further this goal.

For example, one Web consultant called and said, *"You are not getting nearly as much traffic as you should. I can help you get much more."*

He would advise me, he promised, on how to help my site get more hits than the New York Yankees. I politely explained that I had absolutely no desire to increase hits to my website and was not interested in what he was selling.

Frankly, he was baffled. Maybe you are too. *"Who doesn't want more hits on their website?"* you might be thinking. *The answer:* Plenty of folks.

Before you can meaningfully enhance a website, you need to understand the business of the person or company sponsoring that site ... as well as the business objectives they want the site to achieve.

In the case of www.bly.com, I'm a freelance copywriter and consultant specializing in direct marketing. I serve

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a higher-end clientele — major direct marketers, Fortune 500 companies, and substantial technology firms — and charge accordingly.

This makes me different from many entrepreneurs who have websites — in two important ways.

- **First**, 99.99 percent of people cruising the Internet are simply **not my prospects**. I'm highly selective. I don't work with small firms, start-ups, mom-and-pop operations, home-based businesses, and wanna-be entrepreneurs ... precisely the mass market that's cruising the Internet looking for free marketing information and advice.
- **Second**, with more business than we can handle, our office (I have two assistants) can't waste time responding to low-level leads. Handling inquiries from casual Internet surfers takes time and effort ... and we need to devote those limited resources to the needs of our many ongoing clients.

“**Having a website eliminates that cost and wait. When a prospect wants a package, we can send it immediately.**”

Then why do I have a website?
That's the key relevant question — and it's one almost no one who seeks to advise me asks.

My website exists primarily for instant-inquiry fulfillment to qualified prospects.

What does that mean? Before the Internet, when a serious prospect called, we'd send him an information package describing my services.

That involved a lot of priority mail and overnight courier bills. And even with overnight shipping, the prospect often waited up to 24 hours to get his hands on the material.

Having a website eliminates that cost and wait. When a prospect wants a package, we can send it immediately. But we first ask, “*Do you have access to the Web?*” If they do, we send them to **www.bly.com**, where they can instantly get all the information they need to make a decision about using my services.

What to Put on Your Consulting Website

What should that information be?
In his book *Roger C. Parker's Guide to Web Content and Design* (MIS Press) **amazon.com**, my friend Roger Parker says content should consist of two components:

1. Information your prospects need to know in order to buy from you.
2. Information you know that will convince prospects to buy from you.

My website, **www.bly.com**, covers both these areas. The “*need-to-know*” stuff includes:

- An overview of my services (our home page).
- An online portfolio of my copywriting samples.

- Pages on each major consulting service (copywriting, consulting, copy critiquing).
- My credentials (on an “About Bob Bly” page).
- Client list.

The stuff that helps convince prospects that I’m the person they should hire to write their copy includes:

- Client testimonials.
- Descriptions of the marketing books I’ve written.
- Samples of how-to articles I’ve written on marketing.
- A list of recommended vendors that shows I have the connections to help potential clients get whatever they need done.
- Methodology — the processes and procedures I follow in my consulting work.
- Contact — an online response form that a prospect can use to request more information on my services as related to his specific needs.

As you see, my website is totally oriented toward the needs of my potential clients and hardly at all to those of the casual Web surfer.

How can the website translate directly into business? Because many of the people you get to come to your site will be prospective clients. They will read your credentials and service descriptions, which will indicate that you are qualified and able to solve their problem. If they

want to talk to you about their specific needs with the idea of hiring you, they can call. Or, they can e-mail you directly from your site.

Increasing Traffic and Hits on Your Website

“I want to market my business on the Web, but how do I get traffic to my site?” one client asked recently. ***“And if I want to sell my product or service using e-mail marketing, who do I send the e-mails to?”***

Here is one online marketing methodology that has been proven effective for many different types of businesses ...

The primary concept is that online marketing works best when you e-mail to people who already know you. Therefore, successful online marketers build their “house file” or “e-list” (lists of prospects and their e-mail addresses) using the process outlined below — and then sell to those people via e-mail marketing:

1. Build a website that positions you as an expert or guru in your field. This is the “base of operations” for your online marketing campaign.
2. This website should include a Home page, an “About the Company” page, your bio, and a

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page with brief descriptions of your products and services. (Each product or service description can link to a longer document on the individual item.)

3. You should also have an “Articles” page, where you post articles you have written on your area of specialty, and where visitors can read and download these articles for free.
4. Write a short special report or white paper on your area of expertise and make this available to people who visit your site. They can download it for free — but, in exchange, they have to register and give you their e-mail address (and any other information you want to capture).
5. Consider also offering a monthly online newsletter or “e-zine.” People who visit your site can subscribe free if they register and give you their e-mail address. You may want to

“ The idea is to drive traffic to your site — and then get them to sign up for either your free report or your free e-zine. ”

give the visitor the option of checking a box that reads: *“I give you and other companies that you select permission to send me e-mail about products, services, news, and offers that may be of interest to me.”*

6. The more “content” (useful information) on your site, the better. More people will be attracted to your site

and they will spend more time on it. They will also tell others about it.

The idea is to drive traffic to your site — and then get them to sign up for either your free report or your free e-zine. Once they register, you have their e-mail address and can now market to them via e-mail as often as you like at no extra cost.

The bulk of your online leads, sales, and profits will come from repeat e-mail marketing to this “house” e-list of prospects. Therefore, your goal is to build a large e-list of qualified prospects as quickly and inexpensively as you can.

There are a number of online marketing options that can drive traffic to your site. These include: free publicity, e-mail marketing, banner advertising, co-registrations, affiliate marketing, search-engine optimization, direct mail, and e-zine advertising.

The key to success is to try a lot of different tactics in small and inexpensive tests, throw out the ones that don’t work, and do more of the ones that are effective. ■

If you get a lot of e-mail inquiries that are pretty much the same, consider creating templates to reply to the questions you are asked most often. Not only will you save time, your responses will also all be well-structured and well-written.

