July 12, 2013

Hi Lisa;

It was a pleasure talking with you; I know we went over a lot of material so I’ll try to recap as best I can.

Your business is your web site, so you only have a few seconds to not only garner a potential client’s interest but to get them to trust you to that certain degree where they will take the next step in trying to accomplish whatever they came to your web site for in the first place. So ask yourself—what steps does a client need to take in order to complete the full process of using your web site? Write those steps down for the client and walk them through the process **on your web site**. Confusion leads to frustration leads to leaving your site.

You can make incremental improvements that are within budget and will help you see results. First, try to think in terms of a customer and what that customer needs and not what you and your business needs. If you please the customer, your business needs will be more than met.

My first impression of your web site was that it was derived from a template and that it was rather generic looking—if you Google medical supply web sites or medical sites in general, most of them use the same color scheme—blue, white and gray—and also incorporate the Physicians’ Staff logo. You can dare to be different, because your personality and your experiences should be some of the main selling points of your web site. Use interesting colors, such as green (symbolizes health), orange (vitality), and a larger and more stimulating type setting. Have a professional design your logo; you can use it on your business cards and in your letterhead, and if it’s clever people will remember it.

Different fonts evoke a variety of emotional reactions from viewers, and you can use this to your advantage by incorporating two or three fonts of different size, face and weight. This brings your customer into your site by visual appeal and keeps them there longer. Achieving an interesting typography has never been easier with free Google fonts: <http://www.google.com/fonts/>

Iconography was also mentioned by others on LI and I agree that clean, well-crafted representations add even more to the visual interest of a web site. Icons are pictorial representations of symbols and are a sort of bridge between type and images, for example, in this web site: <http://2012.buildconf.com/> if you scroll down to the Workshops area, you see four large boxes that contain representative icons that fit well within the entire design and are also striking in the way that they draw attention to the subject.

This is a well-done web site because it mixes altered photographic images with drawn graphics, the right amount of white space, and the color red—an underused color that evokes strong, passionate feelings.

“Above the fold”, the area of a web site that first appears when it’s loaded, is the most valuable piece of real estate on a web site, because it is here that your customers will make their decisions about whether to stay and find out more or to leave your site and go on to one of your competitors. That’s why this area has to be carefully plotted out and designed to a T—no spelling or grammar errors, and include a “Call to Action”, which in your case would be having the client go on into the web site to find and purchase medical equipment. You can mention that parts of your services are free but this is not the key selling point—trust in you **is**.

The reasons that clients stay or go are varied, but aside from a bad or confusing design, one of the main reasons site lose business is that they must engender a certain amount of trust within those first few seconds when the person has landed on the home page for the first time. That is why I suggest you put your picture and your story in the area where the moving slider is now. You could put it in a slider, but you don’t want the client to be overwhelmed by motion, so if you do this you would have to lose the rotating advertising banner on the right. However, that advertising banner is located on what is known as ‘prime real estate’ for your paying vendors, so keeping this banner but making sure that you are charging more for advertising here can add to your financial bottom line.

You can have a web designer/developer make changes to the existing template you have. The difference between a web designer and a web developer is that a designer composes the visual look of the site and the developer composes the programming. To save money, find someone who can do both. I suggested going to a local Arts college and trying to find a student getting ready to graduate who would work on you site for a set price or a low hourly rate—nothing lower than $15 - $20 an hour, because you don’t want the contractor to feel that their work isn’t valued and therefore not give you 100%. That person may be looking to build up a portfolio, and your site would be perfect for this. That means that you pay them to build your site and they then use a picture of your redesigned site in their own web site examples. You need a professional video done too—this should be on the front page of your site and not lead the viewer away to YouTube; there are ways to do this technically. I would try to knock both of those tasks out here: <http://www.artinstitutes.edu/atlanta/about/>, or in the Visual and Digital Arts departments at Spelman or Morehouse Colleges.

If you feel you want to start over, try to find a better template, such as one from http://themeforest.net. We looked at eCommerce sites there and saw a variety of interesting sites that could be purchased for under $100. Then you just need someone to customize it for you.

We talked briefly about my process in designing a web site to fit the needs of the client and the customer: My work from 2006, <http://magnoliarecovery.org/> to my redesign-in-progress, 2013 <http://comrieconsulting.com/BNB/index.html>. Note the small details, such as the borders, the transparency and 3-d effects—these small touches are what differentiate an average web site from a highly professional one.

It’s worth getting your web site tested by as many people in as many demographic groups as is possible for you— <https://earl.io/>looked like a pretty good service to me although I haven’t tried them yet. You could also Google ‘web site usability testing’ and perhaps find a few more companies that do this. A ‘before’, ‘during’ and ‘after’ report would be ideal.

A few things that we didn’t talk about but are important are web page loading times—when I looked at the source code of your web site, I saw a lot of unnecessary HTTP requests. Every file or image makes a separate request to the server you’re hosting your web site on, and too many can slow a page down to the point that the client will get frustrated and give up. Whoever codes your next site should put all their JavaScript files into one page, all their style sheets into another.

Also remember that this is YOUR business, and it’s up to you what images are used. The ‘mom and pop’ photos aren’t awful, but there should be a link to their web site too so that a customer can evaluate them as well, a link to your local Better Business Bureau should be on the bottom of your own web site (you need to join if you haven’t already) and have your vendors provide you with more views of their products—so you can see them from the side, the back, and so on.

I suggested that you narrow down your scope of products being represented. Lose the veterinary links—it makes your site look like it’s trying to be everything to everybody, instead of the absolute best service to a specific group of customers—let’s say those shopping on behalf of elderly relatives or the elderly themselves. There’s plenty of room in that market to start and perfect your business acumen as well as make a decent living.

To wrap up, Lisa, think of these three things: engendering trust, narrowing your focus but making your service there top-notch, and looking at things from your customer’s viewpoint first. You start there and I think you’ll be fine.

If you want to contract me for further consultative work or web work, I charge $50 an hour for what I just gave you, and $30 an hour for web design and coding. Good luck and let me know how things go for you in the future!

Oh, a P.S. on office space—Co-working is a great way to save money without having to sign a lengthy lease and to meet other entrepreneurs such as yourself. I found these just by Googling your area:

<http://www.ignitionalley.com/>

<http://wiki.coworking.com/w/page/16583399/CoworkingAtlanta>

And regarding Meetups (I attend Las Vegas Developers, Las Vegas Javascript Group and Business Networking Meetups)—maybe these are worth exploring for you:

<http://www.meetup.com/Social-Media-Atlanta/>

<http://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Internet-Marketing/>

<http://www.meetup.com/womenintelligentlynetworking/>

<http://www.meetup.com/EHEATLANTA/>

Sincerely wishing you the absolute best—

Vickie Comrie

Comrieconsulting.com (coming soon!)

Indiconv.com (also coming soon!)