

Build a Great Web Site and Come Up First on Google:

The Smartest Thing You'll Ever Do for Your Business, Reputation, and Income Part 1

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Our society, our culture, has immutably and irrevocably joined the Internet revolution. The vast majority of my present clients and certainly all of my future clients do and will “Google”—it’s so ubiquitous and powerful it’s become a verb: to find a product, service, or piece of information as surely as the sun rises. As a craftsman (and hopefully at the same time interested in raising your skill level in the craft of operating a small business), you certainly can deny or resist this reality, but I believe that choice will make you an anachronism: a relic from a different age. And not in a good way...

On the other hand, if you choose to embrace the moment, and explore the possibilities of the World Wide

Web as one of the best, most personal, most honest and transparent advertising, branding, and marketing tools that exist, it will pay off in ways both financial and personal that can be literally beyond your dreams, beyond what you can see for yourself.

Three years ago I started to sell pianos in Los Angeles after being a fairly well-known technician there for many years, and my market seemed to be people and entities who wanted to buy big (seven feet and longer) expensive, high-quality manufactured or remanufactured grand pianos. I knew that to be successful, I had to draw from a larger geographic area than Los Angeles. I had to be known nationally, and the only way I could see to do that was to have a good Web site, a deep, rich-with-text place where potential customers could, with certitude, get a sense of who I am, almost as if they had had a conversation with me. This, actually, was my stated goal—to have a Web site that would serve the same purpose as personal word-of-mouth: establishing trust.

I’ve seen many technicians’ and piano businesses’ Web sites that are the kind that take 20 minutes to set up—usually inside a “free” or ad-supported mega-site complete with its templates

for your pages—maybe five or six hours of preliminary work to write the copy, paste in a few clip-art downloads, include a bad photograph or two, and: Voila! The Web site of a refined professional.

Hardly.

My friends, the human brain is a wondrous thing: it can actually tell whether somebody has put love, time, passion, and thought into something, or whether somebody has just tossed something off, gotten it “out of the way,” taken the easy road.

Brains, and the whole package that contains them, are perceptive. People you want to do high-end piano work for are very, very perceptive, and

smart, and picky. Their first perception of you is crucially important. Just like when you do your first tuning for a great new client—you want to blow them away.

Building your own, custom, deeply authentic and personal Web site is key. It’s the same in advertising as it is in piano work: quality is instantly apparent. And yet so many of us deny this.—Even though our piano work may be excellent and our ethics and craft sense are of the highest caliber, we think it’s acceptable to show up at a customer’s home looking rough around the edges, in a forlorn vehicle, with an old tool bag, homemade business cards. We make the same poor impression with a thrown-up, assembly-line, inexpensive “quickie” Web site.

There’s a dissonance here. Can you see it and feel it? People, the world at large, all your potential and future premium clients, want to see the same level of craft and attention to detail in all of how you represent and explain yourself before they give you their most precious treasure—their trust. The kind of Web site that you can make for yourself with qualified and practical professional help can exponentially increase your opportunity to quickly win that trust and get the first crack at a lot of quality work—to be one of the technicians, or



The front page of David Andersen's website, www.davidandersenpianos.com.

the technician in your community that people describe as the best, “the one to get.”

First, understand that you get what you pay for. If you have experience writing HTML code with Flash expertise, and have a gift for visual and graphic design in a modern, artisanal, appropriate-to-the-niche context, and are a first-rate, interesting writer—by all means make your own site; it will require a lot less cash, but likely hundreds of hours of concentrated work, depending on the depth and quality you’re aiming for. Remember: the world runs on first perceptions, first looks, snap judgments; most people won’t give you a second glance, and they won’t value the knowledge inside of you, if they aren’t attracted and reassured pretty much immediately by that first look.

Or, you could get some help. Do some research. Take it seriously. Get some quality personal referrals for Web designers from successful small business owners you know and trust. Look at dozens of piano and other related Web sites. Use common sense. Hire a professional Web site designer in your area, or one you know of that has done sites that you consider to be good-looking, easily navigable and well laid-out, with information-rich, intelligent copy, and niche-appropriate tone and feel.

Do not make your decision based on price; make it on quality and interest.

It is crucial to have a very clear idea of what you want. For my Web site, I made a detailed outline on a yellow legal pad. I visualized different areas—*Home, About Us, Piano Services*, and so on, and then broke the areas down into sub-areas.

Don’t be penny-wise and pound-foolish; get your site built by somebody whose work thrills you, whom you think is really good, and figure out a way to pay for it. It will pay for itself many times over if you do it right—if the site feels good, looks good, and tells people exactly who you are and what you do, not in stale “sales” language, but in your own words, in your unique style, as created or edited by a better writer than you if necessary.

Don’t be afraid of being creative, of being just who you are, of letting people know the strength of your love and commitment to pianos and the work. I can’t stress this enough; stretch past your comfort level on this one. People love it when they feel your passion and commitment; they tend to trust you and want to give you money.

Explain all the services you and your colleagues provide. In my opinion, a piano technician should offer what I call “complete piano service” (Please visit www.davidandersen-pianos.com for a complete explanation). If your clients trust you, why not provide, by outsourcing piano work to trusted colleagues, everything a client could possibly need concerning pianos through your company? It’s a natural thing; good clients expect it.

Be as specific and in-depth as you like. Photos by a good photographer are essential. Explain your philosophy of busi-

ness. Explain how you fell in love with music and pianos. Introduce colleagues who inspire you. Be a teacher; people who like pianos and are intelligent consumers love to be educated. Have your grateful clients provide testimonials about your good work. Make your site original. Make it look and feel like how you “are,” how you do business. Put enough energy into your site so that it impresses and “blows away” that person or those persons who love you, support you, and always tell you the truth—your own personal “review committee.” When your site gets them excited, you’ve met your goal.

If you work hard at this, commit to it, and get it done, you will be grateful you did it for the rest of your career.

Many of my colleagues have a barrier against investing in the marketing side of their businesses—the side that lets your community know what amazingly good products and services you have to offer, what immense value you bring to each job and client, what a cool human being you are, how you operate in an excellent, ethical atmosphere; marketing allows the world to perceive you as a serious professional worthy of generous compensation. I don’t know why my colleagues have this barrier, but they do.

I encourage you to follow the lead of other successful businesses and market yourself in a way that’s real and true, and that you’re proud of. Marketing does not equal cheesiness or venality. Properly done, it equals success and security for your family. Marketing done right, with common sense, equals a recession-proof business you can always be proud of and that always has commercial value because of intense brand identity, such as that of Google or Amazon or Pixar. These are brands you can trust, and that trust has been built by effective marketing.

The Piano Technicians Guild is a highly prized and trusted brand in the world of quality piano service. In Part 2 of this series, I’ll show you and tell you how you, and your business, and your team of colleagues and collaborators, can be the Google, and Amazon, and PTG of your city, or county, or area—can be a well-known and trusted brand for “everything piano.”

In Part 2, we’ll explore:

Why a good Web site is like the Yellow Pages, personal referral, an electronic billboard, and a TV show all rolled into one.

Why niche-market (pianos) geography-specific search engine optimization (SEO), done by a hired professional or service, is a slam-dunk, guaranteed business builder, relatively inexpensive, and why it should be a lifetime-funded business expense.

Some prime examples of exclusively Web-generated piano sales and service.

I’ll just tease you with this: investing in a good, rich website and then marketing it intelligently has seen a spectacular return on investment for my own business. I’ll explain how spectacular next time. Until then, keep breathing and enjoy life.