



## Investing in Your Marketing Materials :: Website

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Continuing in our series on Investing in Your Marketing Materials, this month we're addressing your website. Our advice on this topic is broken into three sections: form, function, and timeliness.

### Function

Consider that your website is the first real impression many of your prospects will have of you. Have you ever gone on a date with someone who was attractive, seemed intelligent, humorous, etc. (whatever trait might capture your attention), only to find out that once you got past the first thirty minutes of conversation, the attraction ended? You don't want your website to be the buzzkill of your marketing efforts either.

Building a quality website will cost you money—think in the \$20-30,000 range if you want it to operate as a true part of your marketing arsenal. Unfortunately though, this means that many people scrimp, or skip altogether, on this crucial element. Spending \$20-30,000 total on a variety of marketing pieces such as your brochure, advertising, direct mail, etc., isn't such a hard pill to swallow—you think you're getting more bang-for-your-buck. But, if your website isn't invested in with the same earnest, all that bang isn't worth a buck.

While it's the first impression, your website is actually many times the second stop in a prospect's exploration of your product; although, it happens to be where they get the real meat of who you are. Typically a consumer comes to your website after getting a direct mail piece, seeing an ad, etc. They come for private exploration of your offerings. Typically at this stage, a consumer isn't ready to talk to a sales agent; they want to quietly look at what you're all about and decide from there if they want to take the next step. With the content supplied on your site, you should be giving them every reason and opportunity to take that next step.

By seriously investing in your website, you can have a wealth of information about your marketing process and prospect at this point in a consumer's exploration. You should be able to tell which marketing tool drove them to your site; you should be able to tell what content is most important to that consumer; and finally, you should be able to ultimately capture the identity of each serious prospect through opt-in forms that then link all activity history for that user. For example: at this point, you should know that Prospect Susie in Chicago responded to your ad in *USA Today*, navigated from your home page directly to the floor plans section and spent 45 minutes perusing your offerings of 4 bed/3 bath layouts, and came back to visit three times before finally asking for a package of sales information to be mailed to her office address. If your website doesn't do this for you, then you're missing the boat.

### Form

Who said looks don't matter? They do. Perhaps the biggest mistake people make with their website is overlooking the importance of including it in overall brand cohesion. One of the pitfalls in this process is assuming that a web programmer is a graphic designer. That would be like assuming your builder is also an interior designer—there might be one in a million, but it's a rarity. You really need both (the programmer and designer) to build a solid website. Harkening back to what we said about your website being the first impression, but actually the second stop—if your website doesn't hold the same esthetic value that the rest of your marketing elements do, it creates a gap in branding that usually leads to a consumer discounting your product. Wouldn't you be skeptical of someone sounded and looked one way today, but tomorrow sounded and looked different? When you lead prospects to your site, they should experience a continuation of your brand.

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## Timeliness

Our point to make here is to keep your website up to date. Nothing discredits you more (not even bad design) than old information flashing on your homepage. If you can't commit to keeping it current, then don't put time-sensitive information on your site.

There is so much more we could say about building your website, but those topics are full-bodied enough to be newsletters of their own. This should give you a brief idea of what you should be getting out of your website. Next month we'll finish our series by addressing the outreach and advertising elements of your marketing materials.

Fresh Creative is a communications and design firm that specializes in marketing real estate development and hospitality properties. We use strategic process and experience to develop comprehensive solutions that create distinctive impressions.

### Contact Fresh

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