



# 5 Common & Deadly Website Mistakes

How do you get the most value out of your website? Singularity explores 5 extremely common pitfalls and ways that you can avoid them.

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*a white paper by*

**Singularity**

Yes, the title of this white paper is dramatic. It's also very true. A well planned and executed website can drive your business forward to completely new levels. These five mistakes, all of which are preventable, can take the air out of your tires and leave you wondering what happened to the investment you made in the future of your business.

## Deadly Mistake #1: Not Defining Clear Goals

This is the big trap, the one responsible for most of the misfires and lost opportunity on the web. You're at a point where you've realized that your existing website is not up to par (or you don't have one in the first place). You know you want better, and that has spurred you into action.

The key is to respect the model of strategic planning, which can be broken down into three key parts:

- **Goals** - the desired business results. The main outcome that, at the end of the day, will determine whether you are successful or not.
- **Strategies** - These set the direction that will lead to the realized goal.
- **Tactics** - Specific activities or tools that are used to implement the strategies.

To put it another way, the Goal is the destination, the Strategy is the road and the Tactics are the tools which allow you to move along that road (the car, the driver, the map of gas stations and rest stops, etc.).

All too often, people say "I need to make progress with my business and I need my website to get me somewhere", but then they jump right over the goals and strategies, and right into the tactics. RFP's are generated with big lists of required features and components, but with very little detail on the true business objectives, and even less room for discussion and revision. Do not fall into this trap. If you skip over the definition of goals and the planning of strategies, there is a very good chance that many of your tactics will be mismatched and not get you anywhere. At the same time, if you don't give your interactive agency a clear and concise vision of your goals, you are sure to miss out on valuable recommendations and insights.

The best time to involve a professional interactive agency like Singularity is at the beginning of this chain, either just after the goals have been identified, or even earlier than that. Bringing professional expertise and decades of experience to the table during the strategic process results in much more cohesive and tightly focused websites. That means much stronger results with much less wasted energy.

## Deadly Mistake #2: Lack of Targeted Metrics

Congratulations! You've avoided Deadly Mistake #1 and you're implementing Tactics, selected to support Strategies, which are focused on your Goals. You're in the car, on the road heading towards where you want to be. The problem is, how will you know when you get there? How will you know how fast you are moving towards it, how far away it is, and whether you are speeding up or slowing down?

The second Deadly Mistake is failure to establish a method of measuring, evaluating and maximizing your success. Information is power, and this is your opportunity to gather critical information and make your website more powerful and more effective.

### Good metrics are ones that are:

- **Reliably Trackable** - It doesn't do any good to choose a metric that you will be unable to accurately record and measure.
- **Relevant to your Goals** - Choose metrics that are as close as possible to your actual goal OR metrics that represent critical points in the conversion process.
- **Statistically Significant** - You need to be able to collect enough data within a reasonable period of time to make strong decisions. If the metric you are tracking happens so infrequently that it takes a year of data to be able to interpret anything, you will have a very hard time responding to changing market conditions.

Installing a tracking system (such as Google Analytics) and establishing a relevant set of metrics is the first step, and there's no time like the present. If you have an existing website you are planning to replace, and it isn't tracking traffic, retrofit it so you can start collecting data now. This will give you a set of baseline data which will allow you to really measure the improvement from your new site. If you're not sure how to get started tracking your website traffic, Singularity can help.

### Deadly Mistake #3: Discounting Your Role in the Process

Here's a secret straight from the inner sanctum of the online marketing industry. Whenever web design experts gather to trade stories about website projects that turn into nightmares, there's one common reason that will come up again and again: the client.

The fact is that as a client, your role in the success of your own website project goes far beyond just signing the checks. You will have a very significant impact on how smoothly the project runs and how well the site turns out in the end. Your influence ranges from providing clear business goals (see Deadly Mistake #1 above), to providing information to serve as the base of content on the site, as well as providing timely feedback when creative concepts and drafts are presented to you. Deadly Mistake #3 is not accepting the magnitude of your own impact on the project.

It's not really a mystery why these areas are problematic for many clients. They are very busy people, and the website is often a special project rather than a part of their everyday activities. Often, the website is a moving target, jumping up and down the client's list of priorities. The thing to remember is that delays, inaccurate information and incomplete feedback can hurt you in four ways:

- **Opportunity Cost of Lost Time** - You are pursuing this project because it will enhance your business. A 3 month delay before launch means 3 months of lost opportunity.
- **Increased Direct Cost** - Shuffling staff around and chasing down information from clients can add up to real time and real expense for an agency, and that passes through to you.
- **Reduced Accuracy** - The longer a project drags out, the more time passes between the launch of the website and the development of the strategy behind it.
- **Strained Relationships** - Your agency is working to help you improve your business. It's hard to maintain that type of emotional commitment if they feel like they are being brushed aside.

Of all five Deadly Mistakes, this is the one that requires the most self-discipline to overcome. Be realistic about the time that you will have to put towards the project. If it's more than you can make available, then delegate the tasks to other team members that you can trust to get it done. If you find yourself falling behind, or overwhelmed with related or unrelated issues, talk to your agency. They can often come up with ways to get some of the tasks off your plate. There may be some costs associated, but they will be much smaller than the combined cost of significant delays.

## Deadly Mistake #4: Treating Your Website Like an Island

"No man is an island"... and neither is a website. Relatively speaking, the website is the new kid on the marketing block. The traditional advertising clique is TV, radio, print, outdoor, direct mail, and telemarketing. All of these media have been stitched together into coordinated campaigns for decades, but many people still view a website as part of a completely different universe.

Deadly Mistake #4 is not taking the opportunity to tie all of your traditional marketing and advertising together with your website. The most value comes from viewing a website not as an island outside your regular marketing plan, but as the hub at the middle of it.

The first step in capturing this value is a very basic one. Put the website URL everywhere. Put it in your TV ads, mention it in your radio ads, put it on your billboards, and put it in all your print communications. That just scratches the surface, though. Think about bringing your TV and radio ads into the website to give them longer life and a larger audience. Make your printed materials available as PDF downloads for increased distribution. Consider special offer URLs for different offline campaigns so that you can start to track the effectiveness of those campaigns alongside your standard website analytics.

The possibilities for cross-media integration are almost endless, and the potential rewards are huge.

## Deadly Mistake #5 (The Big One): Focusing on Cost Rather than Value

This is probably the greatest disconnect in the history of advertising. More than any other medium, the web represents truly infinite variation. EVERY brand exists in its own unique set of market conditions and circumstances. EVERY website represents a unique set of needs and opportunities. At the same time, a vast number of business owners and marketing managers really don't know how to evaluate and put a value on their options when it comes to having a website planned, designed and built.

With such huge differences between processes, skill levels, functionality and results, clients often end up trying to deconstruct their need and figure out "what SHOULD this cost me". Deadly Mistake #5 is becoming fixated on cost rather than working to evaluate the anticipated value of what you will get. In some cases, this leads to selecting the wrong partner or agency. In other cases, it leads to the tragic choice to delay or cancel initiatives that are critical to the company's overall business goals.

There's nothing wrong with paying attention to cost, but the proper way to do that is in the context of a Cost/Benefit Analysis.

### Here's a simple example:

- CompanyCo gathers sales leads online.
- Their sales team closes 1 out of every 4 leads.
- Their average sale size is \$3,000.
- Their gross margin is 20%.
- Their website gets 200 visitors per day with a very low conversion rate (into leads) of 1%.
- CompanyCo has set what it believes to be an easily attainable goal of increasing its conversion rate to 2%.
- CompanyCo is evaluating two agencies to redesign their site. AgencyA clearly has a much higher level of design and a stronger track record, and is bidding \$50,000, while DesignGroup has an average portfolio, but is bidding \$25,000.

### Existing CompanyCo website:

200 visitors per day  
x 365 days  
x 1% conversion rate  
x 25% close rate  
x \$3,000 order size  
x 20% gross margin  
= \$109,500 profit per year

The existing, poorly performing CompanyCo website generates an annual gross profit of \$109,500.

### Redesigned website:

200 visitors per day  
x 365 days  
x 2% conversion rate  
x 25% close rate  
x \$3,000 order size  
x 20% gross margin  
= \$219,000 profit per year

If CompanyCo believes that either agency will be able to hit its target, the revised site will generate an additional \$109,500 in profit per year.

At this point, hiring either agency would result in a strong positive return on investment within the first year. If that was the end of the story, DesignGroup would be the clear choice, because CompanyCo

would be able to keep an extra \$20,000 in profit.

Ahh... but here's the trick. If CompanyCo sees that AgencyA is clearly superior, then they would expect some amount of additional benefit over DesignGroup. If AgencyA increases CompanyCo's conversion rate to 3% instead of 2%, CompanyCo will spend \$20,000 more at the beginning but bring in an ANOTHER \$109,500 in profit in the first year!

So how does CompanyCo figure out how much better they expect AgencyA to be than DesignGroup? The answer is that they don't have to. All CompanyCo has to do is figure out how much better AgencyA would have to be in order to cancel out the difference in cost between the two agencies:

$$\text{Necessary increase to cancel out cost difference} = 1\% \times (\$25,000 / \$109,500) = 0.23\%$$

In other words, if AgencyA's higher quality and experience can deliver an incremental 0.23% improvement in conversion rate over what DesignGroup can deliver, they are essentially equal within year 1 (and AgencyA is a profitable choice in year 2).

In the end, CompanyCo will still have to make a judgement call about how big the difference is between the two agencies, and other factors will certainly play into the decision-making process. The key is that they will have a proper context and a proper sense of financial scale with which to make that decision.

## It's All About Communication

Here are 5 Common and Deadly Mistakes with one common weakness: a lack of communication. They can all be avoided with good communication, a little self-discipline and a bit of help from the right interactive agency.

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