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Many firms don't understand why they need to be concerned about their web sites. They assume that having a site means that task is done and they never have to worry about it again because now they are "on the Internet."
Why is a web site so critical? You may know how good your firm is, but many prospects will probably go to your web site before "committing" to a phone call, meeting or even sending an e-mail. What they see when they go to your web site can often kill an "opportunity" before the prospect ever contacts you.

Your web site needs to impress the following three groups:

- **Prospects**. Nine out of 10 prospects will go to your web site before contacting you. This number probably goes to 99 out of 100 if the prospects are under 40 years of age.
- **Referral Sources**. How can a referral source send a client or prospect to a firm with an outdated or poor quality web site? When that referral source's client or prospect goes onto your site and sees something that their 15 year-old can do a better job of designing, that reflects on the referral partner. The safe bet in this case is for the referral source not to send the lead.
- **Recruits**. Today's college graduates grew up on cell phones, high-speed Internet and e-mail. Although your firm may be a great place to work, it may not be enough to overcome what "appears" to be the technology-lacking image projected on by your web site. You may have the most technology advanced systems in the world, but if it isn't evident by what you put on your web site, most recruits won't be interested

in going beyond that initial image. If it's weak, their impression will

There are four critical errors most accountants make with their web sites:

- **The web site is boring**. Statements such as "We are
  a high quality firm, doing high quality stuff for extra special people like
  you," or introductory comments like "Our firm was started in 1963
  in a fish hut by our founder Fred," do not belong on the home page of
  your web site. There may be a place for these types of comments in the firm's
  history section, but prospects care about what you are going to do for them
  today, not what someone else did 40 years ago. Your web site exists to create
  the opportunity to develop a personal relationship. It should be used to entice
  the reader to call, visit or e-mail.
- **The web site has too much content jammed into a small space.**
  Accountants sometimes write their web site content with the mentality of explaining
  everything. It's almost as if they feel they are getting a lower cost
  per word by having long strings of text and lots of paragraphs. There's
  no extra charge for bolding or bullet pointing thoughts. A reader likes to
  glance first and then read details if something catches their eye.
- **The web site is rarely, if ever, updated.** Clients may
  get a monthly online newsletter, but the description of the firm's services
  and other items never change.
- **Search engines are not informed**. If you Google or Yahoo!
  for an accounting firm in your area and wonder why your firm's site
  is not included in the results, it's because no one took the steps to
  improve the chance of getting better placement with the search engines.

The biggest sin of all is very common. Here's a direct quote I heard
from a client: "I really don't know what the web site says."
And I've heard the following response from a small firm: "I have

not read it in years, and when I did I just glanced at it." My personal

firm.

- **A reader gives you 30 seconds**. If you cannot capture a reader's attention by then, they're most likely to leave.
- **Be careful of a flashy site**. If a site requires special tools in order to read the content, or if it makes the reader go through dancing numbers or images with upbeat music, many will just move on. ? If you have a poor web site … it burns an image of inferior quality, which the reader may then begin to infer about your firm's capabilities. This is a horrible, but true consideration.
- **If you have a newsletter on the site … you better read it**. It may say things you don't agree with or know about. Nothing is more embarrassing than getting a call from a client that you advised to take a certain course of action when your newsletter says just the opposite.

The primary reason a web site exists is so prospects can find you. Yes, it is a resource for some clients, but the core purpose is to attract new prospects. If you don't have a web site, it tells a prospect and referral source that your firm is technologically behind the times. If you are behind the times with your web site, they'll question whether you are deficient in other areas?

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Bob Lewis is the founder of Visionary Marketing — helping CPA firms with business development strategies to target new clients, increase existing client revenues, and build referral partner networks. Visionary becomes the Marketing Director for small to mid-size firms or acts as the Chief Marketing Officer for larger firms. Mr. Lewis can be reached at 800.995.9186 or at www.ThinkVisionary.com.

Technology

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