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I know what you're thinking ... this is going to be another article about how to build a website. While I could have given you a Website 101 primer, I think our time is better spent telling you what I learned when I recently built a website for a client.

In full disclosure, 1) the client is [SWK Technologies, Inc.](#), a Sage software reseller and developer in New Jersey that also brings its clients custom programming, network services, HR counsel and several other offerings; and 2) I didn't actually *build* the site myself. We had help from an outside provider. What I provided was counsel on all

aspects of the website, from the initial concept to turning it on. I also had lots of help

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the game plan along the way as long as it makes sense. In other words, don't change your plans just because someone wants to control a certain situation, which leads me to the second lesson.

Establish your ground rules from the start. Sure, everyone should play nicely in the sandbox, but as the consultant, I made my point crystal clear that I was not in the business of playing games just to feed someone's ego. As a result, the changes we made — and many of them were very significant — occurred because there was a business case involved. I have to give kudos to the SWK team for sticking to this resolution.

Choose a provider you trust, but don't expect miracles. I'm not going to tell you who the provider was. Overall, the experience was positive, but I walked away from this project understanding that what I may think as "customer service" isn't always the same for the provider offering the service. My lesson? There are no stupid questions. What you may think is a stupid question probably either hasn't been thought of by the provider or the provider may believe you already know the answer to the question. My advice is to ask as many questions as you want; after all, you're paying for service, so you can, at the very least, expect answers. This leads to the next point.

Set deadlines for your own milestones and for the provider, as well. Hopefully, you are creating a website with a plan in mind for the site, but I think it's equally as important to set firm deadlines so you can hit your milestones. If the end result of turning on the new site is scheduled to occur 12 weeks from now (that's *really* fast), then you'll need to structure your plan accordingly. If you're running behind (which certainly happens — and it happened here), then adjust as needed.

When I say to set deadlines for the provider, you need to talk with the provider about a reasonable response time to get your questions answered and the work

accomplished. What the provider may think is reasonable may not sync with your

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choice. It's easy to use, easy to manage, and comes with page after page of built-in help and lots of other help via simple Google searches.

Now, that I've learned and used Drupal, I have to honestly say that I would have preferred WordPress. I suppose it's tough for an old dog to learn new tricks. I found some of the functions in Drupal just aren't as user friendly as WordPress. My advice to you is to test and play with whatever system you think you want to use in order to have a comfort level with the CMS. This is very important.

SEO cannot be avoided. From my experienced readers, I know this is a big Homer Simpson, "D'oh!," but for the uneducated, you must, must, must have a Search Engine Optimization (SEO) focus for your site. I can't really say this was a lesson learned because I wholeheartedly believe in the power of SEO. Yet, the reality I want to pass on to you is that you cannot manage the SEO yourself; hire an outside consultant to do this (full disclosure, again: I don't offer SEO services; I outsource this for my clients). Nowadays, you have to submit and resubmit your pages to search engines, not to mention constantly add pages and content to continually boost yourself to the top of the rankings. This is just too much to handle within your firm or business. Outsource this and find a trusted provider.

Now it should be said that your website provider probably offers SEO services. I think that's great, but I still would employ an external company that can do this separately from what the website provider offers. You can structure your agreement with the website provider to include this function (probably for some kind of fee), but you'll reap greater rewards if you find your own solutions to SEO. Trust me on this one!

Final Thoughts. I'm running out of space, but let me impart one final word: Don't expect your website to generate 100% of your leads for new clients or customers, and don't expect it to be the sole reason why 100% of your current customers or clients stayed with you. Your website is one in a full arsenal of great tools you have right at

your fingertips; don't rely on it to be your only marketing/communications tool.

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