



## 3 *Really Bad* Website Mistakes Businesses Often Make, But Can Easily Avoid

**Don't be guilty of making these website mistakes that can potentially cost your company big money and even destroy your online reputation**

In the last two months alone our company has received several calls from businesses that were *desperate* for someone who could help them fix one of three common problems related to their websites. The sad thing about each situation was that the problems were easily preventable – if only the business knew what questions to ask their web designer when the website was first built and published.

### **Really, Really Bad Mistake #1: Your Business Does Not Have Control Over Its Domain Name**

In December 2009 we received a call from the pastor of a local church who was frantic about the church's website. The pastor's call was routed to my desk and he explained that he wanted to hire us to update the church's site to include an announcement about an upcoming Christmas choir program. Unfortunately, his original web designer was not returning repeated phone calls for help with this fairly simple task.

Before committing to update the church's website I first set out to learn the basics about the website such as the domain name, the URL address for the site, the original web designer's name and phone, and where the site was hosted. I performed a *WHOIS* search on the domain name to check the registration record and discovered that the domain name was going to *expire in three days* – a fact that came as a complete surprise to the pastor.

The fact that the domain name was about to expire wasn't the worst news, however. **The domain name was registered in the web designer's name only.** Because of this **the church had no legal rights to their own domain name** which by now had been published on church stationary, business cards, and untold numbers of other printed materials distributed by the church. If the web designer could not be reached within three days the domain would expire and the church would likely lose it forever.

This story had an unfortunate outcome that could have been much, much worse. The original web designer had moved out of state to take a new job (presumably without telling any of her website clients). She was finally reached by email and agreed to transfer the domain name to the church before it expired.

Sadly, the web designer did not offer to continue to host the site. So, we managed to transfer all of the site's original content to a CD until the church could decide what to do next.

In January 2010 we received another call from a small company in Seattle, WA. In that case, the original web designer registered her client's domain in her own name. She then created a cheap, one-page website and sent the client a bill for \$250.00.

Three months later the Seattle client felt cheated that he wasn't getting any website traffic and decided to hire another web designer to do the job right this time. Unfortunately, the original web designer refused to transfer ownership of the client's domain name without payment of another \$250.00! In that case we advised the Seattle company to pay the \$250, get control of the domain name (which by now was printed on thousands of dollars of company stationary and advertising), and consider it a hard lesson learned.

The website story that tops them all was one we became involved with in May 2009. A new client was referred to us and during the first meeting we learned something startling. The previous web designer had exclusive (legal) control of the company's domain name and was refusing to transfer it to the company unless it paid him \$5,000.00! His claim was that he had done some work on a *proposed* new website and felt he should be paid for that work. The fact that the company did not order the work apparently made no difference to the web designer.

### **The moral of this story:**

NEVER, NEVER allow someone not employed by your company to register your business' domain name. Or, if the web designer registers the domain on your company's behalf it should include the name and email address of an employee of your company. In the event something happens to the web designer it will be much easier to retain legal control of the company's online brand in the form of its domain name.

### **Really Bad Mistake #2: You Don't Know Where Your Website Is Hosted**

You wouldn't believe how common it is for a business to have no idea where their company website is hosted. Suppose your web designer is hosting your website and he suddenly disappears (as in the example described previously). It could be tough figuring out where in the world your website is hosted should you want to hire a new web design company to take over the job. Without this information, along with the information on how to access the hosting account, your company risks losing the entire contents of an expensive website.

### **The moral of this story:**

Find out from your web designer where your site is hosted and how to access your hosting account should you need to. Any reputable web design firm will gladly give you this information on request.

### **Really Bad Mistake #3: You Don't Have a Backup of Your Website's Content**

Most reputable web design firms will maintain a secure, backup copy of their clients' websites. It's not a bad idea for your company to keep an additional backup copy of your website since no one can foresee the future. Web design companies of all sizes go out of business all the time. If the worst happens you can always fall back to your company's own copy of the website and minimize the cost of having it rehosted on a new server.

#### **The moral of this story:**

Ask your web designer to schedule delivery of a copy of your company's website, say, every six months or so. More frequent deliveries should be scheduled if your site undergoes frequent updates that would be expensive to recreate. But in a disaster any kind of backup copy would likely be better than no backup at all.

#### **Conclusion**

The three website mistakes outlined in this article are very common. The implications of these mistakes won't be felt by your company until some unforeseen occurrence happens. Clearly, the safest thing to do to protect your company's online assets is to be sure you have legal and physical control of all of them. This includes your registered domain names, your site's hosting account, and physical backup of your website content.

I believe that the frequency of the problems I've described may have something to do with the present down economy. Many web developers who jumped into the web design business only recently could not weather the downturn in business and eventually closed their doors. For this reason companies should be cautious about trusting their online assets with web design firms that have not been in business for at least several years.



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