



Never lose control of your web brand.

by Bill Krueger, SKSW Inc. – June 2009

That's a pretty sweeping title, but here's a real-life example of a smaller business that we are working with to regain control of their brand on the web.

A few years ago, this company needed a new web site developed, and was looking for a professional-grade web presence. They found a developer that had been with one of the big four consultancies. The developer had a great pedigree, a polished pitch, and was hard to resist as a new business with very competitive rates.

So, off we go into the wild web yonder, where big strategies sometimes don't translate well to small business. Overall the site was, as you could guess, clean and professional looking, and it contained all the necessary information. But the site contained three layers of spiffy Flash navigation, with tightly focused (minimal) information on each page, and was needlessly complicated to navigate.

The developer then suggested adding more business functionality, but wanted to utilize a different host to better support newer technology. The developer registered a new domain for the client under his name, not the client's. The updates were developed live as part of a new site, on the new host and domain, with links between sites to share new pages as they came into being, and then...the developer went MIA.

Oh, no!

The client now has two domains, but only owns one. The information between the sites is not consistent page-to-page, one has incorrect contact information, and both show up in search. The developer did not provide the source files for either site, or login information to one, so the work to remove the links between the sites, update the contact information, and redirect to one domain to straighten out search engine (and user) conflicts is made needlessly difficult. Who knows the lost opportunity from customers viewing old content and bad contact information?

We will correct the content, clear up domain ownership and search results, and then review analytics and user comments to develop our plan to improve the user experience and increase conversions, which will probably include making the site much simpler. We will turn this situation into a positive one for the client, but here are some rules that you should follow to be sure you don't succumb to this same situation, and that you control your web brand:

- 1) Always make sure your domain names are registered to you, with the same registrar so you can track renewal status easier. It's a legitimate strategy to have multiple domains, with targeted titles and content (like a micro site) or just as redirects to your main site. It all helps search results, but think twice before changing domains, as older domains rank higher in search.



- 2) Develop your site in a test environment before letting it be visible in public. Nothing like broadcasting what you're going to do, before you're ready to do it, especially when you don't have the design down tight, or your content or campaign is not complete.
- 3) Don't get locked into a template or technology that prevents you from making content changes without "breaking" the design. It makes your web site look inappropriate for your market, or worse, looks like a beginner site.
- 4) Don't use more technology than your web site requires. Get multiple opinions. As an example, having Flash elements can make your site more engaging, but most business web developers will try to avoid Flash for navigation because it is not as search engine friendly as other options. Another example might be, why have a contact form, when most users are happy to click on an email address to invoke their own email software?
- 5) Require a set of the source files and admin login information from the developer once something goes live, and get an update whenever major changes are made. You paid for them, they're yours. It's part of a good business recovery plan, just like backing up your business system!

Question or comments? Let me know your thoughts. Email: bkrueger@sksw.com