

## intelligence vault MARKETING

### how to build a powerful website

~ Mark Healy / Partner / Torque

I'm doing renos on my house. Going for a very modern look. Straight, clean, sleek lines. Low knickknack factor. If it was entirely up to me, most rooms would look like the inside of the Death Star (just dated myself) – all glass and dark metal. No plants. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on your perspective, I'm married and my wife has input on these decisions.

Anyway, here's what I was told would happen, by my friends who had been through the process: "it will be way more work than you're predicting." They're correct.

The same can be said for overhauling a website. We just went through a complete company website rebuild. It was a massive amount of work. And we learned a ton. I sat down with Terence Smith, one of our marketing consultants who led the site build from our side, to sort out exactly what we learned. I didn't have a tape recorder (just dated myself again, doh!) so what follows is a somewhat approximate/in some cases mostly made up transcription of the 'interview'.

**Me:** Wow, our new site is killer! I'm going to look like a genius!

**Terence:** But I did all the work.

**Me:** Ah. Yes. You're going to look like a genius!

**Terence:** Can we just get on with this? I have real work to do.

**Me:** Right. So, what were our top three learnings from the whole experience?

**Terence:** Besides me needing to ask for a promotion?

**Me:** [blank stare]

**Terence:** Well, the first big takeaway is that creativity takes time. The whole creative design process just can't be rushed if you're going to get it right. The second is you have to hire the right firm. We used n49 ([www.n49.com](http://www.n49.com)) and they were a great match in terms of skills and the way they work (like us). Last – there is a massive amount of work required before the coding starts – it's the classic iceberg analogy where what you see in the end is about 1/11 of the up-front work required to get it right.

**Me:** Ok, can we go back to the start and work through the process in order?

**Terence:** Don't you ever get sick of recording processes?

**Me:** Huh?



**Terence:** Forget it. The very first step in the process was really when you decided we needed to re-communicate our brand entirely. That led to us examining all our brand touch points – it helped us understand that a complete website rebuild was required. So we blew it up and started over.

**Me:** See, I told you I would look like a genius.

**Terence:** Whatever you say. Anyway, assigning an internal champion to run with the project was the second step, with an understanding there would be time and money support from the Partners.

**Me:** Didn't you really start with an analytics audit of our current site, to understand which pages mattered most?

**Terence:** Yup – and the home page, experience/clients and team were definitely the most important.

**Me:** Ok, what next?

**Terence:** I looked at a ton of websites – both at other professional service firms/marketing organizations, and at sites that had nothing to do with us. I looked for 'goods' and 'bads', and then revisited the good sites to write down best practices.

**Me:** But the research went deeper – we also looked at the viability and alignment with how customers want to or should experience us on the web as well, right? (e.g. not everyone wants to come to our site every day – they come with questions, and they look for stories, etc.)

**Terence:** Right. So, I made a series of documents for us and for the firm we would eventually hire (a rough sketch of pages we'd need, a functional specification, and a deck of elements we generally liked and hated in terms of aesthetics and navigability).

**Me:** Please speak more in English.

**Terence:** What we wanted, how it would work, and pictures plus flow diagrams.

**Me:** That's what I thought.

**Terence:** Next up we looked for help – we made the call that this was well beyond us, and we wanted to hire a firm that could do all of the things we wanted in a site. We interviewed six firms, and selected n49, based on some criteria we had set out and a good degree of gut feel (on quality, price, speed). I handed them all the documents we had prepared and you, Binns and Tasha started writing content.

**Me:** They walked us through a number websites, didn't they? Working with us to find more sites we liked and giving direction (vertical orientation, depth) on design?

**Terence:** Yes. And this is where we also really started to get specific in our 'asks' and direction. For example, at one point we asked for 'minimalism with strategic complexity', and somehow with enough discussion and iterations they actually delivered just that.

**Me:** Was the iterative process necessary?

**Terence:** Absolutely. We wouldn't have gotten close to what we wanted without all the back-and-forth's. It was iterative on the design front – in terms of look and feel, and on getting all our content into one voice.



**Me:** And this is when we finally got a layout and started the actual build, right? We're at about step 13 right now. That's nuts.

**Terence:** Well, it worked.

**Me:** Checkzone. So, what were the steps to finish it?

**Terence:** The designers put up an off-line site which we could check on and make comments on. We finalized on the design and they started coding. We did a soft launch so that we could get all the bugs out of it. And then we were finally ready for the hard launch.

**Me:** Man, I hope we don't do this again for a couple of years!

**Terence:** [blank stare]

The bottom line here is if you start your website build with page designs, you're probably already in trouble. The place to start is to ask yourself who you are in the world, and how you want to be seen and experienced. Oh, and get some good help – this stuff is really complicated.

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