



Top Six Ways To Improve Your A/E/C Website

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These days, on average, a website for an A/E/C industry client can begin to appear dated inside of 3 years. Constantly changing technology requires that one be more vigilant about staying current than ever. Consider for example, that social media was a blip on the radar screen in 2007, but is ubiquitous today. Personalizing your website for prospects is also much easier today than in the past. Even tools like Flash are being used in more sophisticated ways. While there is no hard and fast rule for when to update a website, look around and you'll see your competitors doing it. The point is that prospects make judgments about your company by visiting your website, along with those of your competitors. If they find stale content, poor navigation or undifferentiated design, they are liable to look elsewhere — unbeknownst to you.

The A/E/C industry, unlike many other areas in the realm of professional services, is one in which how you present yourself has a direct impact on sales. You're selling physical environments where people live, work, and prosper.

In a highly competitive, recession and proposal-driven environment, companies like yours need the competitive advantage of a strong first impression. By addressing these six improvements to your website, you can get a leg up on the competition.

1. DESIGN AND BUILD YOUR WEBSITE WITH THE SAME THOUGHT AND CARE YOU EMPLOY WHEN DESIGNING, PLANNING AND CONSTRUCTING CLIENT BUILDINGS.

You owe it to your business development team to provide the very best sales tools in your company's arsenal – a state-of-the-art website that includes great photography, fresh content, and interactivity to enhance the user's experience and generate leads. Your website is your primary "validation vehicle." It is often the first example of your work that a prospect sees and serves to validate your business as a contender. Not only does

it give you the opportunity to showcase your work for other clients, but also it is a forum for demonstrating your expertise and success. While builders, planners and engineers are not designers, their clients often are thus presenting your work using the best available interactivity, photography and content is what your prospects and customers expect.

2. TAKE FULL ADVANTAGE OF SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING.

The purpose of Search Engine Marketing is to help get the right people — prospects actively looking for your services — to your website.

There are two categories of search to consider, one is known as Natural Search, and the other is Pay Per Click (PPC). Natural search is based on determining what "keywords" prospective clients are using to search for services like yours and then making these words prevalent on your site and in links to your site. The goal of natural search is to get your site to be more highly ranked in Google and other search engine results when prospects come looking.

PPC advertising is a more focused way of getting the same result. This is where you buy keywords and thus your search ad is placed in a separate and more prominent location on Google and other engines from which you buy. Then, you pay only when a user clicks on your ad.

This is a simplification, but Search Engine Marketing has proven to be among the most ubiquitous ways to generate traffic to your website and ultimately leads for your services.

3. USE YOUR WEBSITE TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH CUSTOMERS.

The web is the most democratic of mediums. You have to be dedicated to providing fresh content to your users to keep them engaged and coming back. If you fail to grab them, there is a good chance they will leave your site and take their business elsewhere.



Here are a few tips for making your website more engaging:

- **Use of social media:** Creating a blog, a Facebook site and using Twitter are all ways to build stronger online relationships with your audience and improve your search results. Blogging and tweeting require time and resources, so it's best to participate in these activities if you know your customers and prospects are active social media users.
- **Call to action:** Include some sort of call to action on each page. What is the next step? This could be contact us, download our most recent white paper, sign up for a webinar, read a case study, etc. Do not include a generic call to action that appears on every page. Customize the call to action to make it relevant.
- **Newsletter registration:** If you have an enewsletter, include signup functionality on every page of your site. Create a one step process with a simple text box where they can insert their email address and signup in one click.
- **Resources:** Direct web visitors to related resources by creating cross-links to case studies, services, articles, white papers, tools, proposal generators, ROI calculators, etc. Get them interacting with your site by providing relevant links on each page.
- **Updates:** Allow users to request regular updates and then have a program to auto email them with relevant content.
- **Content management:** Content management can enable a more personalized website experience by feeding up specific content to a visitor based upon past viewing preferences. This has been a very successful B2C practice as evidenced by companies like Amazon.com, but the capability is fully available and highly relevant in the B2B world and is certainly appropriate for the A/E/C industry.
- **Customer testimonials:** Nothing speaks better for you than your satisfied customers. If they are willing, give them the forum.

4. INTEGRATE YOUR WEBSITE WITH YOUR OTHER MARKETING PROGRAMS.

Today, the web is the hub of a company's marketing. Whether you are directing them to it or not, people are visiting your website before picking up the phone to

contact you. Take advantage of this by directing prospects to where you want them to go through using designated landing pages in your marketing. All programs, be they direct marketing, advertising, search engine marketing, PR, seminars, webinars or email blasts should include a clear call to action that can be fulfilled on your website.

The dedicated landing page that you direct prospects to should carry the same look, feel, and content from the marketing program. Use this page to invite the visitor to register to fulfill the offer. In this way, your website becomes a vital part of the lead generation cycle. It captures the contact information of those people responding to your offer. Then, this information can then be forwarded into your CRM program for a sales person to follow up with.

5. MAKE YOUR SITE EASY TO USE AND NAVIGATE.

The name of the web game has not changed since day one. Make it easy to use!


Look at your website and ask yourself these questions: is it evident, right on the homepage, what your market areas of expertise are? Is your messaging clear and concise? Are you able to scan the site and determine where to go next within ten seconds? Or, after ten seconds are images still downloading, is text too dense, or are there too many flashing widgets distracting your attention?

You have a relatively short amount of time to grab a web visitor. If they are not immediately engaged or have to search around to find what they are looking for, they will leave and not return.

6. TAKE ADVANTAGE OF WEB ANALYTICS.

In our experience, a majority of companies do not take advantage of analytics that would in fact provide a very good picture of the effectiveness of their website. Instead they spend thousands of dollars repeating the same mistakes of prior sites.

Analytics can help you determine user paths — where visitors are going, where they are not, and where they're getting hung up. Very often, we discover that users aren't going beyond the homepage because navigation or content is onerous. Wouldn't it be useful to have these statistics and be able to draw the correct conclusions about a site redesign?



The underlying fact is that the A/E/C industry is about relationships. Often, these relationships begin at your website with your ability to provide valuable, interactive content. People do business with those they know, those they've heard of, and those they trust. Your website needs to validate these feelings, and if it does, it can be of great value in the lead generation process. You are in the business of designing, building, and/or engineering spaces. With the same attention to detail, your website can reap rewards for your business.

To learn more about how RainCastle can help you get better results from your website:

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