



Who's Your Website Ambassador?

Like it or not, your Web presence plays an increasingly key role in your organization. Your customers and prospects, Board members, employees (current and future), volunteers, bankers, insurers, investors, vendors and sponsors all look to your site for information, resources, and community. If they don't find it quickly, there are many other online venues for them to defect to.

And there are operational efficiencies to be gained by using Web technology. These can include customer services on a 24/7 basis, human resource applications, sharing of internal documents and other materials with appropriate personnel and clients, project management, and sales of revenue-generating e-books and white papers.

The opportunities are there - and they present new and unique challenges in budget and management terms. Instead of fitting conveniently into a "box" within a department of your organization, as do most of your activities, the Web has the potential to impact your entire business. With good planning and implementation, your site should be both a profit and a cost-savings centre that positions you at the cutting edge of your industry. With a poorly run site, you could be missing out on major opportunities, and look bad to boot!

So where does your Web presence "live" in your organization, and who should be in charge of it? What skill set is required? I've always joked that if your site resides in the Information Technology department, it runs the risk of having marvelous functionality but no message, and if it's placed in Marketing, it might contain stunning copy, but not work as well!

I strongly believe that every business making a serious investment in its Web presence should appoint a "Website Ambassador". This person should be part of the management team. They should have a complete understanding of your ongoing business strategy, marketing and customer service plans, etc. so that they are always able to advise on how the Web can support, enhance and grow those strategies.

Although I don't believe that this role requires direct programming skills, this person should have enough technical knowledge to stay abreast of developments in Web technology from a business perspective, and to evaluate potential enhancements to your site recommended by your designer or others.

They should also be able to analyze the traffic information for your site, or to supervise someone who can do this (whether internal or external). It's important that they can formulate critical questions about the site's performance based on their knowledge of your strategies and desired outcomes, so that you can evaluate your return on investment at a sophisticated level, and make appropriate changes to your content, social media and marketing tactics.

This person should have regular contact with all of your various business areas, be open and available to listen to colleagues and customer feedback, and take into consideration their requests and suggestions for future enhancements.

I also recommend that you put your Website and social media presence on your management meeting agenda at least every quarter. At this time, the Website Ambassador can report on their evaluation and suggested improvements, with possible costs, projected benefits and appropriate priorities for each one.

Ideally, the Website Ambassador should report directly to your Chief Executive Officer. They should have sufficient authority within the organization to be a respected voice at the table, and to be heard during budget and spending decision-making discussions. It is vital to ensure that the Website is adequately represented, since it has such a key role across all areas of your business.

Perhaps the Website Ambassador becomes an entirely new position for you, or perhaps you already have the ideal person. Either way, I hope that I've convinced you that the strategic importance of your Website and social media presence demands that it's more than a junior role.